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HISTORY MAGAZINE

SPECIAL INTEREST MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

October 2025 / **www.historyextra.com**

1066

Who was the rightful king?

THE TUDOR SUCCESSION DRAMA

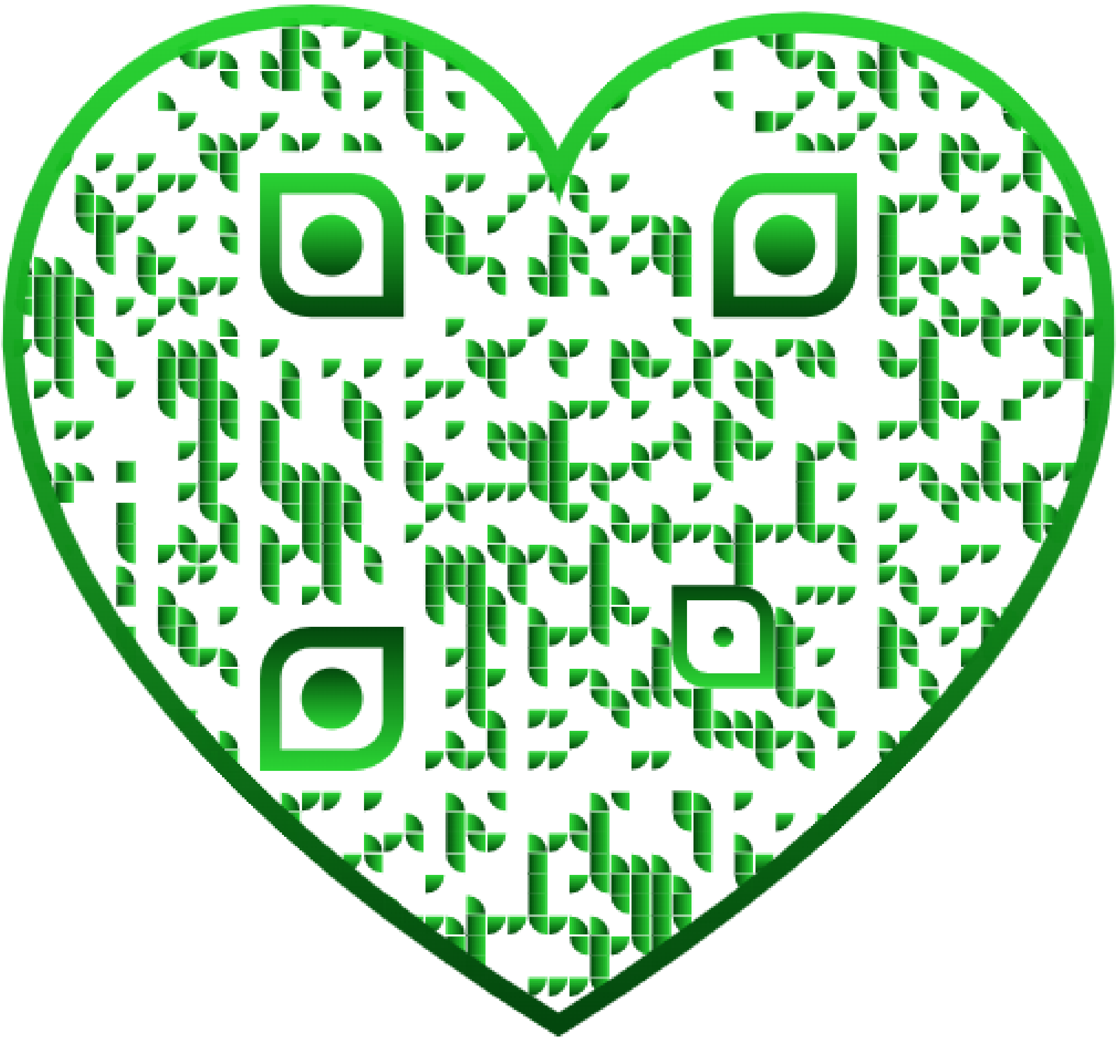
How James VI outwitted his rivals for Elizabeth I's throne

Rome vs Carthage

Why the two ancient superpowers fought to the death

FINANCIAL SCANDAL

Why women have been written out of the story of human prosperity



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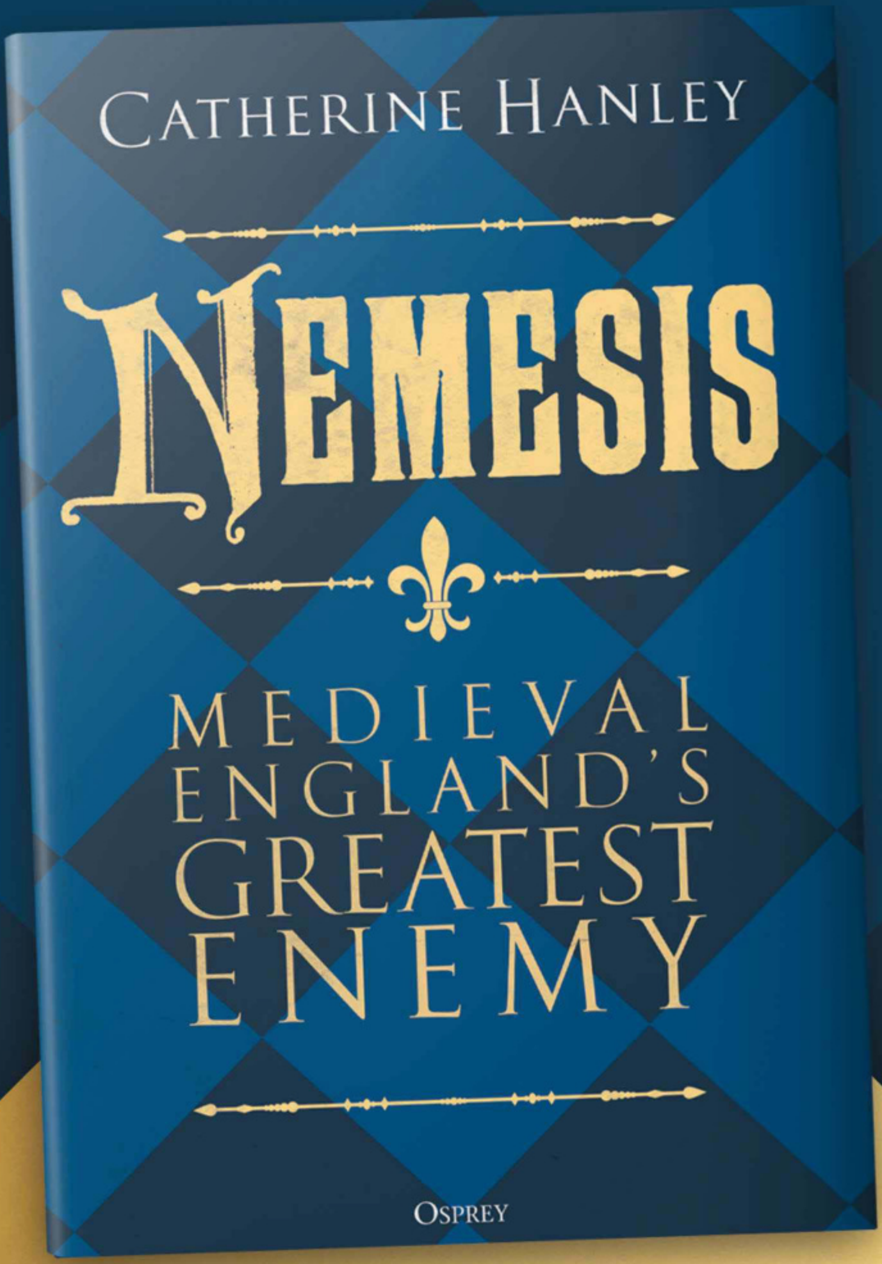
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"1066 is having a bit of a moment. Last month we reported on the news that the Bayeux Tapestry will be coming to the UK, and now the BBC is airing its latest historical blockbuster drama, *King and Conqueror*, which explores the events of that fateful year. For this month's cover feature we asked historian Caitlin Ellis to revisit **the clashes of 1066** and consider which of the contenders for the throne most deserved to wear England's crown. We know that William won it by might, but who should have had it by right? You'll find the piece on page 24 and please do write in with your own views.

The royal succession theme continues this issue with some fascinating revelations about the transition from the **Tudors to the Stuarts**. For most of her reign, Elizabeth I refused to nominate an heir, but it's long been believed that she named James VI as her successor on her deathbed. New research, however, casts doubt on these events. Tracy Borman picks up the story for us on page 54.

Finally, how might **historians of the future** tell the story of the present? With the avalanche of digital sources being created every second, how will it be possible for researchers to cut through the noise and produce coherent narratives? These are questions we explore in this month's *Conversation*, with the help of experts John Wills and Jane Winters, who reveal how technological advances are creating new opportunities – as well as challenges – for historians. Turn to page 11 for their take on how the profession might develop in the coming years.

Rob Attar
Editor

THREE THINGS I'VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Senior citizens
In her review of a new study of old age through history, Pat Thane reveals that long lives were not uncommon in the ancient world, with an estimated 5 per cent of Romans being aged over 60 (page 74).

2. You are blessed
As someone who seems to spend every winter somewhat sniffly, I was pleased to learn in *Q&A* that in ancient Greece sneezing was considered a good omen from the gods (page 43).

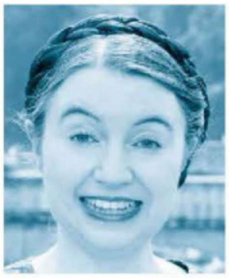
3. Teenage picks
In our *Conversation* article on the history of voting ages, I was interested to read that Britain was the first major democracy to allow 18 year olds to vote, in 1969 (page 15).

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Eve MacDonald
"By looking at the artefacts, archaeology and the historical narrative, we can get closer to seeing the real Carthaginians, beyond a simple Roman story."
Eve explores Rome's relationship with its great ancient rival, Carthage, on page 46

Jane Winters
"For anybody with access to the internet, it's so easy to create content of all kinds – and there's a chance that at least some of that will end up in a national archive somewhere. That brings its own problems, too, of course."
Jane discusses how historians of the future will tell the story of the present on page 11

Saul David
"The Tunisia campaign was so catastrophic that the German public compared it to that other great disaster of early 1943: the destruction of Paulus's Sixth Army at Stalingrad."
Saul reveals how the battle for Tunisia changed the course of the Second World War on page 30



Victoria Bateman
"This is a history of everyone – an economic history that shows how, once you add women and stir, your understanding of the past is transformed."
Victoria considers why half of the world's population has been written out of economic history on page 68

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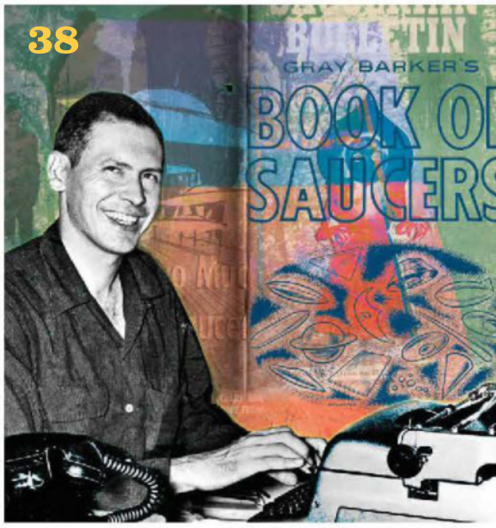
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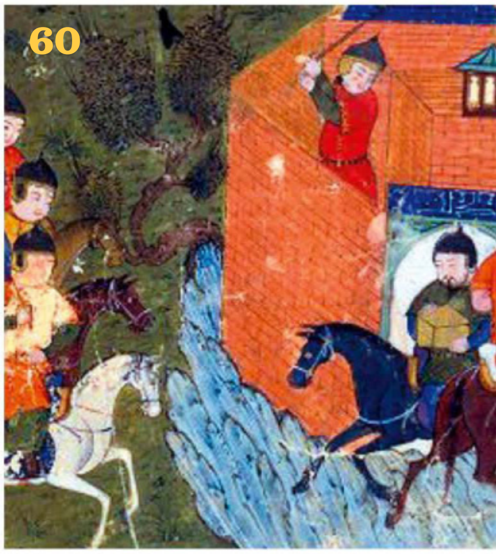
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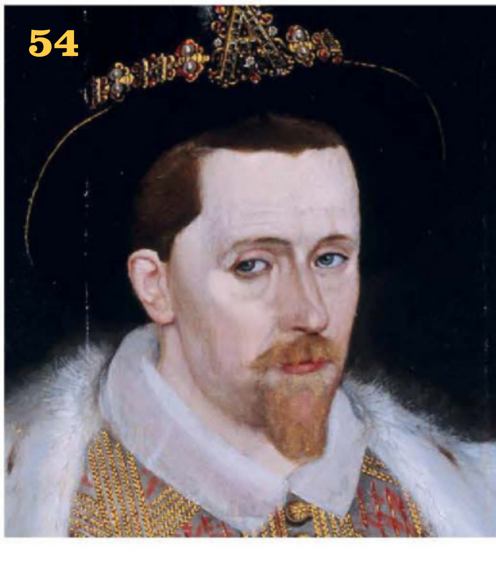
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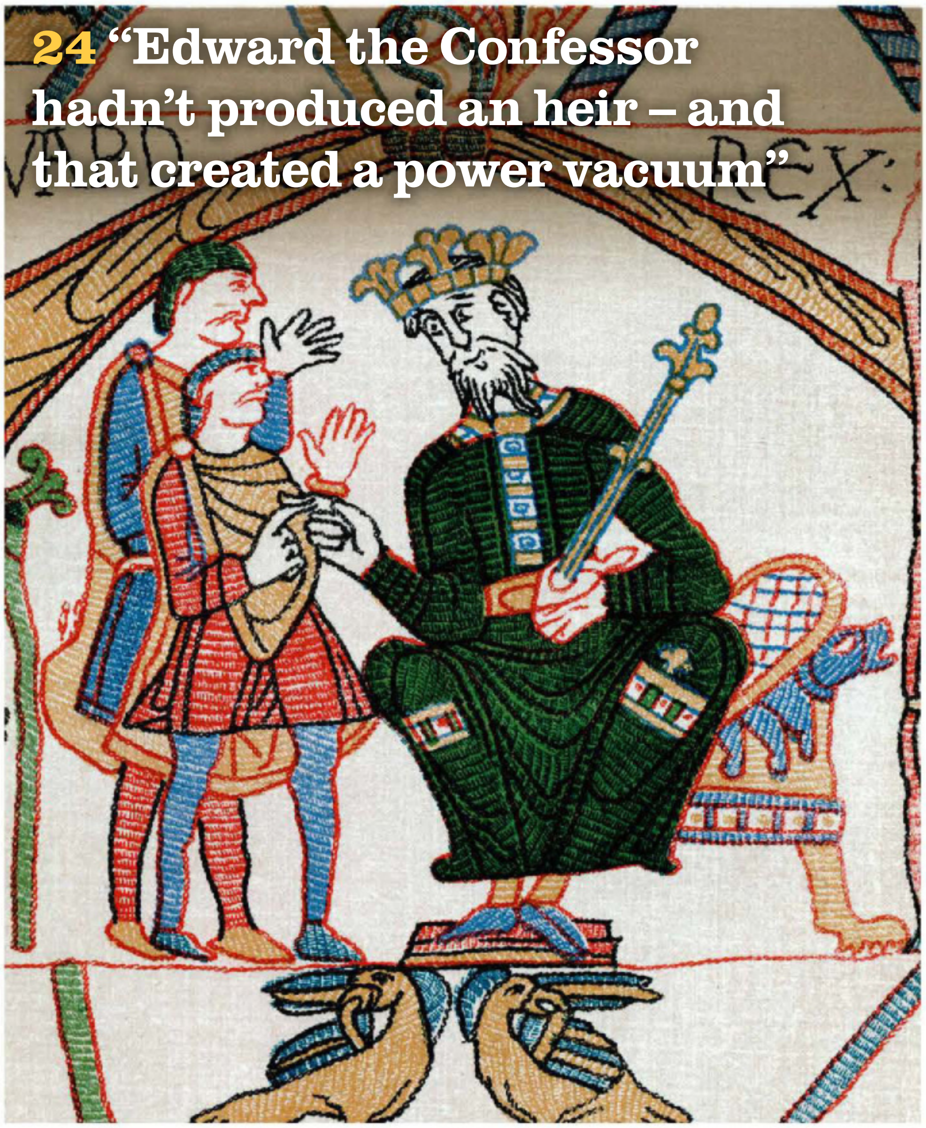

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RACHEL DICKENS/ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO/DAMIEN MCFADDEN

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ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in October in history

23 OCTOBER 1091

A tornado wreaks devastation on London

The medieval storm destroys St Mary-le-Bow church and other landmarks

The autumn sky over London darkened rapidly as a towering whirlwind descended without warning from the clouds. What followed was one of the most violent storms recorded in medieval Europe.

The tornado ripped through the heart of the city, snapping timber and flinging debris like missiles. London Bridge, then a wooden structure rebuilt by William the Conqueror, was torn apart. More than 600 homes, mostly fragile wooden dwellings, were flattened as if made of straw. On Cheapside, at the centre of the chaos, St Mary-le-Bow church was obliterated and four enormous rafters around 8 metres long were hurled to the ground with such force that only a small fraction remained above the surface. Nearby churches suffered a similar fate, their spires and walls collapsing into rubble. The destruction was cataclysmic – yet, remarkably, only two deaths were recorded among London's population of around 18,000 at the time.

The chronicler Florence of Worcester noted that the "violent whirlwind" left a trail of ruin in its wake. Modern meteorologists estimate that the storm measured T8 on the TORRO scale (which tops out at T10) – so it was a 'devastating' event with wind speeds reaching up to 240mph. In today's London, such a storm would shatter windows, twist skyscrapers and hurl vehicles through the air.

Though not Europe's first recorded tornado (earlier accounts exist, notably one in Westmeath, Ireland, in 1054), the 1091 London storm remains one of the most ferocious meteorological events ever to hit Britain.

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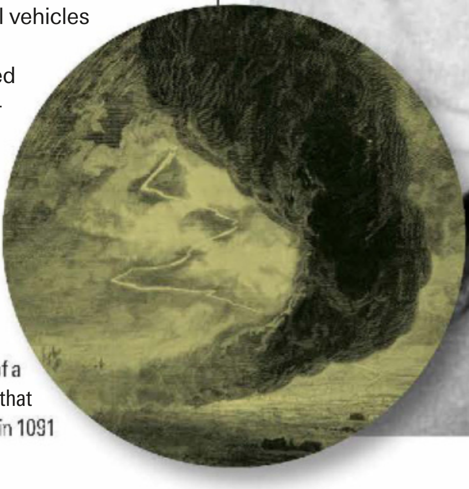
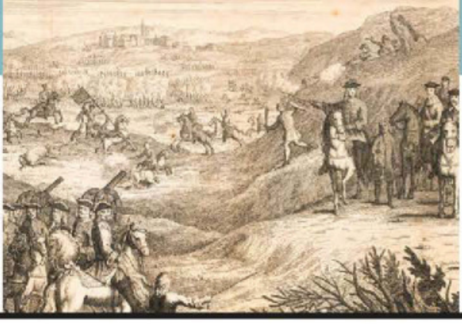


A 19th-century illustration of a tornado, like the powerful storm that devastated swathes of London in 1091



An engraving of c1710 depicts the first major battle of the Civil War at Edgehill in October 1642

23 OCTOBER 1642

Royalist and parliamentarian forces clash at Edgehill in Warwickshire. The battle ends indecisively, with heavy casualties sustained. **It is the first major engagement of the Civil War**, proving the determination of both sides.

Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi in New Delhi, 1979. Five years later she was gunned down by two Sikh bodyguards

31 OCTOBER 1984

Indira Gandhi is assassinated by her own bodyguards

The Indian prime minister's violent end follows a deadly assault on a Sikh shrine

Just after 9am on a pleasant morning in New Delhi, Indira Gandhi, India's first female prime minister, stepped from her residence into the quiet walled garden between her home and her office. She was en route to an interview with British actor Peter Ustinov, waiting a short distance away. Then, abruptly, the peace was shattered.

Two of Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards, Beant Singh and Satwant Singh – men she had trusted, despite receiving warnings about them – stepped forward and opened fire. Beant used his revolver, while Satwant followed with a burst from his Sterling submachine gun. At least 16 bullets – possibly 30 – tore into the prime minister's body.

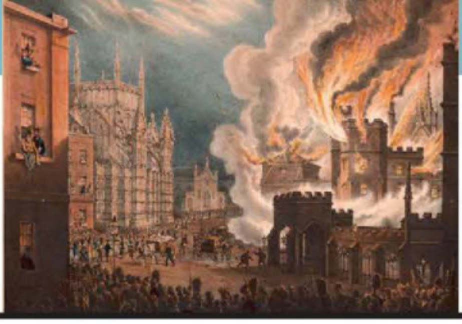
Speaking after the event, Ustinov recalled that it sounded like "nothing more lethal than a popgun… there were no commands or anything, no screams. It was all very silent… quite uncanny". After a brief pause came two more sharp bursts – this time from Gandhi's commando guards returning fire, killing Beant. Satwant was captured, and later executed.

The assassination was the culmination of rising tensions following the bloodshed of Operation Blue Star in June 1984, when the prime minister had sent the Indian army into Amritsar's sacred Golden Temple complex to root out Sikh militants. The attack, which had resulted in hundreds – some sources claim thousands – of deaths, including civilians, had outraged the Sikh community in Punjab. Yet Gandhi, unwavering, refused to remove Sikh guards from her detail, and eschewed advice to wear a bulletproof vest, despite having received death threats in the wake of the operation. The night before her death, she had told a crowd: "If I die today, every drop of my blood will invigorate the nation."

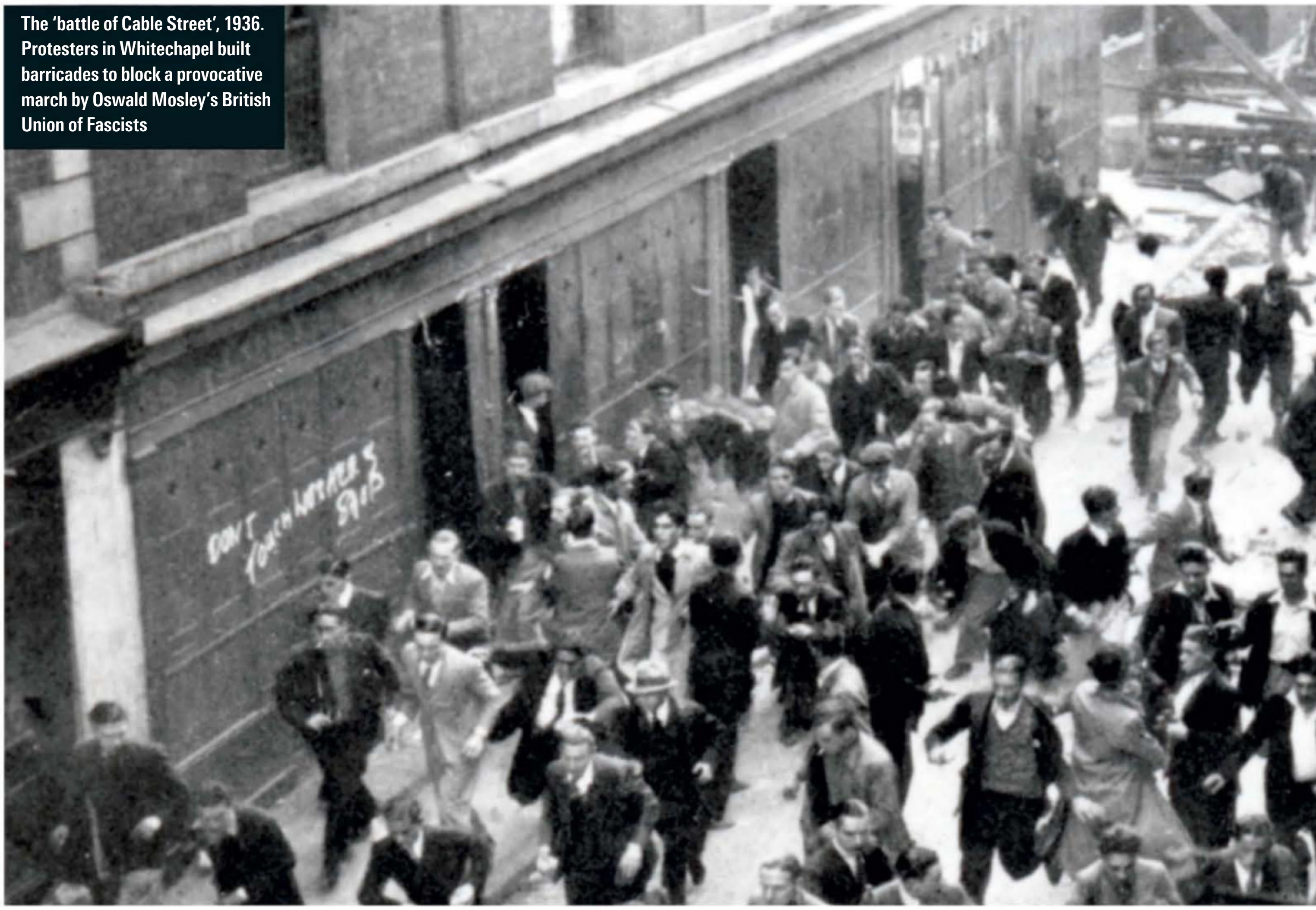
Instead, her untimely demise only exacerbated the nation's divisions, as intercommunal violence erupted across India.

16 OCTOBER 1834

Fire consumes the Palace of Westminster after the heat from a furnace burning old tally sticks – wooden rods used to keep tax records – ignites the floor of the House of Lords. A few parts survive, including Westminster Hall and the Jewel Tower, but much of the medieval complex is razed.



A contemporary illustration showing the fire's devastating impact



The 'battle of Cable Street', 1936. Protesters in Whitechapel built barricades to block a provocative march by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists

4 OCTOBER 1936

The 'battle of Cable Street' stymies Mosley's fascists

Impassioned crowds block the Blackshirts' march through London's East End

Women hurled rotten vegetables and the contents of chamber pots from upstairs windows. Paving stones were prised loose to block the roads, while an overturned builder's lorry became a barricade. Children threw marbles under police horses' feet, while men carrying corrugated iron and barrels dashed forward to reinforce the blockades. As the 'battle of Cable Street' raged, from across the East End came a defiant roar borrowed from antifascists at that moment fighting the Nationalist forces of General Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War: "They shall not pass!"

Earlier that day, 3,000 members of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF) had assembled near the Tower of London, clad in black shirts and protected by some 6–7,000 Metropolitan Police officers. In a calculated act of intimidation, their planned route cut through Whitechapel, home to a large Jewish population and other immigrant communities. But the streets were already brimming with resistance. Tens of thousands of local people – Jews, Irish dockers, communists, Labour supporters and others – were standing firm, arms linked, determined to stop the march.

Across Europe, fascism was spreading with alarming speed. In Germany, the Nazis had banned all other parties, arrested political enemies and built concentration camps. Under Mussolini, Italy was a police state. The Spanish Civil War had erupted that July, when ultranationalist rebels launched a botched coup. It was against this backdrop that British fascists sought to assert themselves: a small but menacing part of a continent-wide crisis.

The clash in London came after years of deepening rancour within Britain. Mosley, a former Conservative and Labour MP, broke from mainstream politics and founded the BUF in 1932, during the Depression. Inspired by Mussolini, Mosley presented himself as the saviour of Britain's economy. But his agenda was rooted in authoritarianism, antisemitism and xenophobia. Mosley's fascists had gained support among voters by blaming immigrants and Jews for rising unemployment and social

ALAMY/TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

Suffragette Margaret Travers Symons was secretary to Labour party founder Keir Hardie

13 OCTOBER 1908

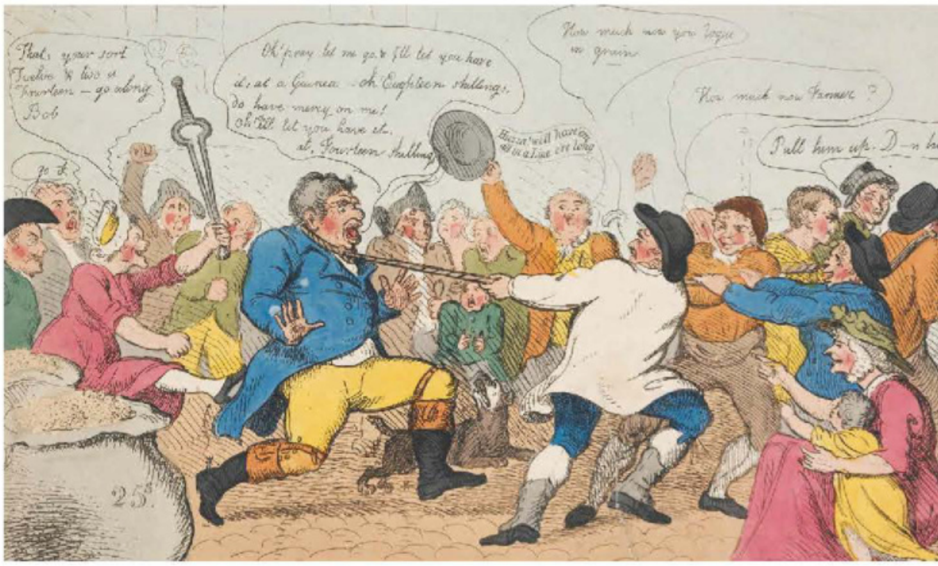
Evading officials, suffragette Margaret Travers Symons bursts into the House of Commons and shouts demands for women's rights at startled MPs. **In doing so, she makes history as the first woman whose voice is heard in the British parliament**.

ALAMY

problems, claiming to be "the patriotic party of the working class".

When Mosley announced his march, the local community reacted swiftly. Despite the government's refusal to ban the event, citing freedom of speech concerns, residents mobilised. On the day, barricades were hastily erected while tram drivers abandoned vehicles across junctions and the Communist Party set up first aid stations. When the police finally ordered Mosley to turn back, some enraged fascists heckled them, shouting: "We want free speech!" as they abandoned the march.

Phil Piratin, one of the organisers of the resistance, later recalled how "the poor houses, the mean streets… were the same, but the people were changed. Their heads seemed to be held higher… The 'terror' had lost its meaning. The people knew that fascism could be defeated if they organised themselves to do so."



That's your sort Twelve & two is Fourteen – go along Bob
go it
Oh! pray let me go & I'll let you have it, at a Guinea – oh Eighteen shillings. do have mercy on me! oh I'll let you have it. at Fourteen shillings
How much now you rogue in grain
How much now Farmer ?
Pull him up. D–n
25

Food prices often caused civil unrest in the Georgian era, as this cartoon from 1800 shows

2 OCTOBER 1766

Cheesed-off Nottinghamians run amok in fury

Fromage affray breaks out during the Great Cheese Riot

Nottingham's annual Goose Fair, normally a carnival of trade and cheer, turned into total chaos in 1766. Amid sky-high food costs and a poor harvest, the sight of mountains of overpriced cheese at the annual autumn event inflamed the tempers of a starving populace. When visiting merchants from Lincolnshire tried to haul away whole wagonloads of the prized dairy product, a furious crowd – led by so-called 'rude lads', women and children – demanded that the cheese be distributed in the city, not sold elsewhere.

Before long, looting and mayhem engulfed Nottingham. Truckles of cheese were seized and rolled like cannonballs down Wheeler Gate and Peck Lane. While trying to calm the disorder, the lord mayor, Robie Swann, was bowled over by a runaway wheel of cheese as the town's authority succumbed to dairy-fuelled anarchy.

Two or three rioters were arrested, sparking greater outrage. A mob stormed the building where they were held, smashing windows and ripping up the pavement until the prisoners were freed. The authorities, having lost control, called in the First Regiment of Light Dragoons and the local militia, their bayonets and muskets primed.

As tensions escalated, soldiers fired into the massed crowds. Their shots killed William Egglestone, a local farmer mistakenly believed to be looting, though in fact he was guarding his own cheese. Before order was restored, unrest continued to rage across Nottingham as rioters hijacked an entire boatload of cheese and arsonists made a vain attempt to burn down a windmill.

Part of a wave of 18th-century urban unrest sparked by food scarcity and inflationary prices across Britain's cities, the Nottingham riot was not mere disorder but a stark expression of popular rage. H

Danny Bird is content producer on *BBC History Magazine*

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THE CONVERSATION

EXPERTS DEBATE HISTORY'S BIGGEST ISSUES

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BIG QUESTIONS

"A tidal wave of digital material will overwhelm recordkeeping institutions"

If you've ever posted a comment on social media, you've created a potential source for future historians. But what problems does this mass of new material pose? Matt Elton asked historians **JANE WINTERS** and **JOHN WILLS** about how recent archives differ from those of the past – and how experts might make sense of them

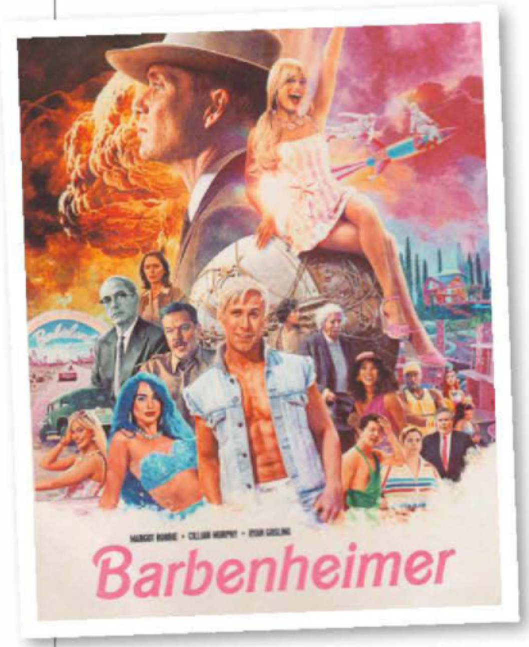
Matt Elton How do the kinds of records created now and in the recent past differ from those left in previous centuries?

Jane Winters Records and sources now come in a whole range of formats. In some cases, they are very familiar analogue sources that have become digital, whereas in others they are in a completely new format. Newspapers offer a great example of how this has changed: we used to read them only in physical form. Then those physical newspapers were digitised, keeping essentially the same structure.

We now have both physical and digital newspapers, which differ in both form and content. An issue of *The Guardian* published in print today will not contain the same information as the online version: there will also be multimedia material and lots of online comments and conversations, whereas in the past you would have had only letters to the editor, for instance.

And to take the example of people's reflective writing, that's a type of source that has also moved into new formats. A diary is not exactly the same as a blog entry or a post on social media, for instance.

John Wills One example that offers an interesting way of thinking about some of these issues is the 'Barbenheimer' phenomenon – the point in 2023 when the movies *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* were released at the same time. That's a very recent instance of the kind of cultural moment that's really interesting to research – but doing so is not easy, because you're dealing not just with the films themselves but also the digital content produced by the films' fandoms, the actors' response to that content, and the wider public responses to those two movies, in a way that we've never been able to do before.



Fan art A poster by graphic designer Sean Longmore celebrating the simultaneous release of *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* in 2023. Today's wealth of online content is a boon and a challenge for historians

Jane Winters An important characteristic of a digital archive that doesn't have an analogue or print equivalent is the mixture of formats it contains. It's not just text, images and moving images, but also all the other novel elements and forms of communication – memes, gifs, emojis – and they're not all always available in an easy-to-search format. The Wayback Machine (*web.archive.org*) is one of the major online archives, and it contains a huge amount of this kind of material – but in a very unstructured form.

Focusing on the new kinds of sources that emerged in the late 20th and 21st centuries, are there particular examples that reveal new things about society?

John Wills One of the areas I explore is the history of video games, which we still tend to see as a recent phenomenon despite it dating back at least 50 years. It's a medium in which the huge volume of material can be both a great opportunity and faintly overwhelming.

There are a few ways in which video games can be useful historical sources. First, a game set in the past can reflect cultural views about that period of history at the time the game was made.

Second, they can also provide ways for the public to get into history: the *Red Dead Redemption* game series [set on the US frontier in the late 19th and early 20th century], for example, has proved to be an entry point to ideas about and narratives of the American West for many people in the same way that TV or film can.

And finally, you can sometimes go into the online world of a game itself and talk to its players about their memories and experiences of that game. That's so different from how we would have worked on the history of memory in previous decades! These kinds of unique opportunities are why we've started to build video games into our understanding of history over the past few decades.

Jane Winters Another recent source of data that's particularly exciting for historians is social media, because the voices and stories of people who would never have previously ended up in archives – unless they encountered the state at some point – are now doing so. It's easy for anybody with access to the internet to create all kinds of content, and there are chances that at least some of it will end up in a national archive. That brings its own problems, because people aren't always considering this when posting an angry Instagram comment! But that really rich conversation is something we haven't had before, and has huge potential. There are substantial social media archives already, and they are going to grow.

New media A scene from 2023 video game *Assassin's Creed Nexus VR*. Such electronic forms of entertainment can prove to be useful historical sources, argues John Wills

This presents a few challenges. One is an issue of preservation and storage: how much do we want to keep, particularly given the environmental impact of digital archiving? We often think of digital records as existing in the 'cloud', but that's in many ways a very unhelpful term, because of course they exist in physical infrastructure.

Another key issue is that this is often not a truly global record: there is inequity in terms of who has access to the internet, and therefore who is able to have their voices recorded in this way. As a concrete example, an exercise led by the International Internet Preservation Consortium collected the websites and other digital media produced in response to the Covid pandemic. It's a pretty diverse collection, but there's almost nothing from Africa and very little from China. So it skews in its story about that pandemic – which was, of course, a global phenomenon.

Despite these limitations, is the depth and extent of this inclusion in the historical record unprecedented?

Jane Winters I think so, and certainly in the sense that people are now creating the material themselves rather than being described by someone else, such as a state body. That ability to tell your own story, and the fact that different kinds of people will routinely end up in archives, is exciting.

John Wills I agree – particularly about the issues of inclusivity and diversity. Historians have always been making those kinds of choices about how to process that historical record, so in some ways that's nothing new.

ALAMY

Old news Men read a newspaper during the UK general strike, 1926. Historian Jane Winters highlights print media as a particularly revealing example of how online records have changed across recent decades

GETTY IMAGES

What potential issues face historians using records created with, or stored on, more recent forms of technology?

Jane Winters A key issue is that digital records are often embedded in systems and structures, and we need to navigate those in order to replay them. Indeed, it's very striking that the word 'replay' is used a lot in relation to web archives – it's less about accessing material, and more about replaying content. I think this is only going to increase as we move as a culture towards using more and more multimedia platforms, so we need to collect the information that lets us understand the structures and systems used to store this content.

One really useful way of framing this is the idea of the 'material culture' of these records. We need to preserve the original form of these digital records so we understand how to work with them and how to reuse them. Memory institutions – places such as the British Library and the National Archives – are making sure they have rooms with equipment and versions of particular computers to replay floppy disks, for example. Things like digital forensics come into play, too, to make sure that you are not altering a file when you open it.

John Wills Video game consoles, for example, have very short lifespans. Even one that sells well might be publicly available for only 10 years, and will then degrade. An emulator can show what a game was like, and you can watch people playing it on YouTube, but that will give you only one view of that game world – what one player did, rather than a wider sense of what the game's about.

Institutions have been set up to preserve video games and their history – for example, Sheffield's National Videogame Museum. But this is a vast history – one console might play a few thousand games – and there are questions about who's responsible for preserving the technology, and how.

So for these sources to be as useful as possible, we need to preserve and understand the context in which they were made and used?

Jane Winters Yes – and there's a concern that context disappears very easily from digital records. 'Context collapse' is something that gets talked about in relation to social media – the idea that it doesn't take long before something is completely decontextualised and reused. It can become hard to trace where a digital record started, particularly if a crucial piece of information has gone – for example, if the original account was closed, it might exist in a very different context from that in which it was created. Because so much of this is happening in commercial platforms, there isn't the attention to public documentation that you would get in a library or an archive.

> " People aren't always necessarily considering the historical record when they post an angry Instagram comment "
>
> JANE WINTERS

Talking about commercial platforms, there's been a recent phenomenon of TV and film companies deleting material from their archives – or, in some cases, not releasing films at all. Does this point to any specifically 21st-century issues?

John Wills This is something you could call 'digital demolition', because it can be very conscious and deliberate. It's sometimes the result of restricting access to archive material in order to create a paywall and charge for access. The online archive of MTV News, which is an incredible resource for people trying to understand the entertainment of the 1980s and 90s, was removed from the internet last year, for example.

But it's important to remember that this isn't new, and that TV and film records have often been lost. We've got very few of the silent movies of the early 20th century, and Charlie Chaplin destroyed one of his own movies [as a tax write-off], for instance. One of the dangers is that we often don't see TV or film productions as useful or valuable.

Who owns our digital content?
Hear more from this conversation on our podcast:
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Loss leader Social network Myspace hit headlines in 2019 for losing 12 years' worth of user content. Such platforms should not be seen as archives, says Jane Winters

A classic example is the tranche of *Doctor Who* episodes that went missing in the late 1960s and early 70s.

Jane Winters We also have a tendency to think about online platforms and content-creation companies as archives. They're not, and they don't have an archival remit or responsibility – they think of that data in very different ways from historians. In 2019 [social media site] Myspace lost years of photos, video and music because of a faulty server migration, for example.

Another issue is the vast volume of records. How will experts make sense of all of the data being created and stored?

Jane Winters The National Archives described this volume as a "tidal wave of digital material… which in its scale, diversity of format, and complexity of structure will overwhelm many existing recordkeeping institutions and practices". And the scale is mind-boggling: The Wayback Machine has more than 946 billion web pages, largely accessed through keyword searching. You can find what you're looking for, but you may have no sense of how vital or representative it is because there's so much material.

We will have to develop strategies to find out what's in some of these digital archives before we can start to dig into them and do the kind of research we want to do. We talk about 'web archives', but they're not archives in a traditional sense, and that creates interesting challenges for researchers, both now and in the future.

Can we identify a moment when this avalanche of records began?

> **" The advent of 24-hour news coverage means that the volume of visual culture can sometimes seem overwhelming "**
>
> JOHN WILLS

Jane Winters It's not been the same in different sectors: the British Library was collecting millions of websites as early as 2013, so that's already a huge collection. But I think the anticipated digital deluge of government records hasn't really happened yet, though it is coming.

John Wills It does depend on the area. If you're working on events in the 1980s or 90s, which saw the advent of 24-hour news coverage, the volume of visual culture can sometimes seem overwhelming. And that information may be supplied in an unreliable way. One of the big new challenges facing historians and other experts is the way that platforms and algorithms work, because they can potentially mislead us as scholars by pushing the most common citation or the view that's been promoted hardest.

We're not necessarily getting an open, full picture of the past – we are getting a version shaped by artificial intelligence (AI) and other forms of machine learning. The data has already gone through a level of selection and adaptation – and that's a real issue for us.

Is AI going to become a growing problem for historians?

Jane Winters It will be a huge issue. That's not to say there isn't already misinformation in archives – we need only think about fraudulent medieval charters, for instance! But the scale is different, as is the entanglement between trustworthy information and misinformation. It's not the role of archives to say if material can be trusted, but as historians we need enough information to make judgments for ourselves. We have the skills – we spend our time assessing information – but we need to have enough contextual material to judge its validity.

Finally, considering all these challenges, how might historians in the future make sense of the late 20th and early 21st centuries?

John Wills It's interesting to think about the image we have of future historians. An episode of recent Star Trek series *Discovery* features an 'eternal gallery and archive': a beautiful repository of items and books from around the universe, all presented uncritically as completely reliable information. It's an example of the idea that we'll have access to sources in a utopian way, whereas the reality looks like being one in which, as Jane says, things are complex and entangled, and historians have to negotiate increasingly problematic routes to access material.

Jane Winters Historians thrive on challenges: having to put together evidence and perhaps take it in a different direction because you found a new piece of information. We've only ever been able to tell partial stories; the challenge for us now is to think about how partial those histories might be. That's why discussions like this are so important – to think about how we can ensure that as much of the material as possible is preserved, where the conversations around that need to happen, which organisations should be involved, and really work together.

So many communities of practice are developing around this, and I have confidence that the work happening in our national libraries, archives and other places will ensure that historians of the future will have enough material to work with.

GETTY IMAGES

Jane Winters is professor of digital humanities at the School of Advanced Study at the University of London

John Wills is professor of American media and culture at the University of Kent

Young heads Protesters gather outside the Houses of Parliament to demand a reduction in voting age to 16. It's hoped that this change might "rebuild trust between young people and political institutions"

SHUTTERSTOCK

THE HISTORIAN'S VIEW

"What it means to be young has shifted over time"

As the government moves forward with plans to lower the voting age to 16, **JULIE V GOTTLIEB** examines previous changes to the age of suffrage – from Victorian democratic reforms to the dawn of the teenager

Trudy Sellick rose before dawn on 12 March 1970. An audio typist, she was keen to complete a most important task before starting work. So by 7am she was waiting for the doors to open at her local polling station for the by-election in Bridgwater, Somerset.

That moment is notable not just for her dedication to democracy, but because it was her 18th birthday that morning – and she became the first British teenager to cast a vote in a parliamentary election. "I wanted to be the first 18-year-old in the country to vote," she said, "and got up early to make sure."

The teenage vote is again making headlines. Keir Starmer's Labour government is moving to lower the voting age to 16 before the next general election, in a bid to break the cycle of political disengagement and voter apathy. (The voting age is already 16 in local council elections in Scotland and Wales, and in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Senedd.) As outlined by the student-led Vote16 campaign, the aim is to "rebuild trust between young people and political institutions".

This is, then, a good moment to reflect on the historical considerations, controversies and points of consensus about when citizens are mature enough to exercise their democratic right and fulfil the responsibilities of citizenship. Is it a sound political calculation for Gen X and Gen Y legislators to mobilise Gen Z and Generation Alpha voters? Or does history suggest it may be a political gamble?

This issue was the focal point of the Representation of the People Act 1969, which made the UK the first major democracy to lower the voting age from 21 to 18. In the campaign leading up to the 1969 reform, as historian Adrian Bingham has argued, "age seems to have overtaken class and gender as the key social divide in British politics".

Reforming acts

Expanding – or limiting – the electorate by defining the minimum age of voters was also an important, if secondary, consideration in franchise extension reforms of the 19th and 20th centuries. The 1832 Representation of the People Act ('Great Reform Act') broadened the property qualification, creating a uniform franchise in boroughs, and stipulated the formal exclusion of women from the right to vote. The 1867 Representation of the People Act (Second Reform Act) extended the vote to urban working men who met the property qualification, and established that voters had to be over 21 years of age.

It was the 1918 Representation of the People Act that dramatically transformed the electoral system. Promoted as the reward of full citizenship for a generation of men who had served their country in war from 1914 to 1918, this legislation enfranchised all men over 21 years old.

For the first time, too, women were also allowed to vote in parliamentary elections – albeit only those over the age of 30 who also met a property qualification. As trade unionist Mary Macarthur noted: "The vote was conceded to women on the ground of their services in the war" but the Act nonetheless "excluded the vast majority of women war-workers."

That age differential was included partly to ease male anxieties about the feminisation of politics, and as a crude way to address the

Female gaze Women queue to watch prime minister David Lloyd George speak in 1918. That same year, some women aged over 30 were granted the vote for the first time

gender imbalance in the age cohort with so many 'missing' young men – the so-called Lost Generation. Another decade passed before women obtained the vote on the same terms as men, under the 1928 Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act.

The emergence of a notable age-related stereotype helps explain the 1969 Representation of the People Act: the 'teenager', product of the postwar baby boom. All representatives of the 'youthquake' (a term coined by *Vogue* editor Diana Vreeland in 1965) – Teddy Boys of the 1950s, Mods and Rockers of the early 1960s, the youth-oriented New Left, the peaceniks, hippies and radicals of the later 1960s, and now teenagers – demanded a reorientation of politics.

Against a backdrop pulsating with youth rebellion, the 1969 Representation of the People Act was less radical or revolutionary than might have been expected. As then-home secretary Jim Callaghan explained: "The only two points on which radical change seemed necessary to the government – the voting age and party labels [party names could now be included on ballot papers] – reflected the change in the social climate rather than any defects of the electoral law."

The legislation was one of a suite of age-related reforms that followed the findings of the Latey Committee (1967) and the consequent lowering of the age of majority to 18 under the Family Law Reform Act 1969. The committee examined the related questions of legal age of marriage, wardship, contracts and property, using tools such as opinion polls and college workshops to understand young people's mentality and aspirations in this new permissive society. The committee recommended that teenagers should be able to marry without parental consent, sign hire purchase agreements, and take on other legal responsibilities from the age of 18.

Electoral divide

The Representation of the People Bill was introduced by Harold Wilson's Labour government at a time when both the Labour and Conservative parties were confident they would win over younger voters. Age was not considered the important electoral divide that it is today, when the Conservative party, the Democratic Unionists and the Reform party have all come out against Vote16. If anything, in the late 1960s the Conservatives were confident that the 'youth vote' favoured their cause.

Both political parties were riding the youth wave and giving in to the 'triumph of youth', replacing middle-aged or older candidates with bright young things. For example, youthfulness prevailed on the Labour side in 1967 when Nuneaton voted for Leslie Huckfield, aged 24, to succeed Frank Cousins, who had resigned. According to *The Observer*, PM Harold Wilson embraced this "cult of youth" by making 'juniority' an asset in the round of ministerial appointments in November 1969.

> **"Both political parties were riding the youth wave, replacing older candidates with bright young things"**

The Conservatives were trying to be just as 'cool'. Around the same time that Prince Charles, aged 20, was invested as the Prince of Wales, 29-year-old Jeffrey Archer won the Tory nomination at Louth, while 26-year-old Christopher Ward was elected in Swindon. The Young Conservatives were trying their best to woo the new teenage electors, too. In November 1969 in Brentford and Chiswick, for instance, the Young Conservatives advertised a discotheque rave with a leaflet asking: "PERMISSIVE SOCIETY – lovely and groovy now – what about tomorrow?"

The Representation of the People Act largely came into force on 12 May 1969. On the same day, in the urban and borough elections, the Conservatives gained 957 seats. The continued appeal of the Tories to young electors was at least superficially corroborated by the result of the 1970 general election, with the surprise victory of the Conservatives under Edward Heath.

The lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 years old meant that some 3 million new voters were added to the electorate. Predictably, politicians debated whether that change would be in the general interest, and whether it would be fair. Pegging maturity to chronological age is a construct, but politicians were reassured that 18-year-olds were grown up enough to exercise their democratic rights. They were better educated than their parents' generation, thanks in large part to reforms such as the Butler Education Act and the expansion of university education.

There was an economic consideration as well: supporters of the legislation pointed out that a large number of 18-year-olds were already self-supporting and even had their own families, and as such should be regarded as fit to assume the full responsibilities of citizenship.

Further, lowering the voting age promised an infusion of young blood in debates, a boost in political participation and engagement, and an investment in the political process. Against the backdrop of the youthquake, the summer of love, and the civil rights and anti-war protests, encouraging young people to tick a ballot paper seemed a better option than watching them "turn on, tune in and drop out", as counterculture figurehead Timothy Leary had recommended in 1966.

If there is a pattern to spot in these events, it is that 1918, 1928 and 1969 were all moments of acute generational conflict and the alienation of youth from their elders. The figures of youth – the missing generation, the flappers, the teenagers (delinquent and otherwise) – were defined by age but also came to embody their age.

They say that age is just a number – but is it? Certainly, what it has meant to be and to feel young has shifted over time. Perhaps in 1969, 18 was just the new 21 – and today, 16 is the new 18. H

Julie V Gottlieb is professor of modern history at the University of Sheffield. She is co-author of *The Aftermath of Suffrage* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

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Episode two | Was it possible to be neutral in World War One?

WORLD WAR ONE
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Episode three | Beyond the trenches: untold stories of World War One

WORLD WAR ONE
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Episode four | Not just the western front: why we can't ignore the rest of the world

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FRAN MONKS

MICHAEL WOOD ON...
CHINA’S ROLE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

“China suffered horrendous losses, second only to the Soviet Union”

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series. His books include *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2021). You’ll find him on X at *MichaelWoodMV*

BBC

THE SECOND WORLD WAR STILL PLAYS A MASSIVE role in our national mythology in Britain. But if I were to ask you: “Who was the fourth ally?” I imagine that most readers would have to think twice. The answer is China.

China fought the entire war – and longer – and suffered horrendous losses, second only to the Soviet Union. Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* documentaries, which included a 1944 film called *The Battle of China*, saw the war with Japan as part of “the struggle of freedom against slavery, civilisation against barbarism”. Films in the series close with the hope that a victory for the democracies – Republican China in the 1930s, don’t forget, had been a fledgling democracy – will bring about “the utter defeat of the war machines of Germany and Japan”.

Today, history is a big deal in China. Since 1949, the Chinese view of modern history has centred on the ‘century of humiliation’ following the First Opium War (1839–42), when foreign powers carved up the country. But more recently, the Second World War has assumed a powerful new role in Chinese nationalism. There’s a museum to the war in Beijing, the Museum of the War of Chinese People’s Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, and a harrowing memorial to the 1937–38 Nanjing Massacre. At the China Modern History Museum in Nanjing, you can dress up in nationalist Kuomintang or communist uniforms and have your photo taken in wartime dioramas. The Chinese view of the conflict has shifted towards showing the country as a heroic participant in a war that was moral and just.

The Chinese had been engaged in hostilities with Japan since 1931, when the Japanese invaded Manchuria. The conflict proper lasted from July 1937 until 2 September 1945 – the 80th anniversary of the conflict’s end is being marked this year. So the Second World War effectively started earlier, and lasted longer, here than in Europe. And without China, the course of the wider war might have been very different.

The Chinese lost a million soldiers, but civilian deaths numbered somewhere between 10 and 15 million, maybe more. Hitherto enemies, the Kuomintang and the communists both resisted the invader, but afterwards fought a deadly civil war that was won by the communists, whom the war had turned into a national liberation movement. (Mao later claimed that the communists might never have won victory without the Japanese.)

So China played a leading role in the creation of our postwar world. As one of the four victorious powers, they should have been able to articulate their own vision of east Asia. The problem, of course, was that in 1949 China became a communist country – and in the Cold War, communism was an enemy of the so-called ‘Free World’. The Chinese Communist Party was not formally recognised as the country’s government by the US till 1979.

There are many incredible stories of wartime China. One involves a young British hero, who is also being celebrated on the 80th anniversary this year. George Hogg was an adventurer who, in January 1938 – shortly after the Nanjing Massacre began – travelled to Shanghai. He helped a New Zealand nurse, Kathleen Hall, smuggle medicine and food to the communist resistance. Witnessing first-hand the brutality of the Japanese imperial army towards the Chinese people, on impulse he decided to stay and help – a story he told in his book *I See a New China*, published in 1944 and adapted into the film *The Children of Huang Shi* in 2008, starring Jonathan Rhys Meyers.

In Hogg’s most famous adventure, he saved 60 Chinese boys orphaned during the war and led them west to Gansu, mostly on foot – 700 miles through dangerous passes, on snow-covered mountain roads. In the end he commandeered six trucks to complete the journey to Shandan county where he created a safe haven for war orphans, founding a school that still exists.

Hogg died in Gansu on 22 July 1945 after contracting tetanus. His tomb in Shandan has a traditional Chinese grave stele with four lines of a poem Hogg loved: *Into Battle,* by the First World War poet Julian Grenfell, who was killed on the western front in 1915, the year of Hogg’s birth. Recently there has been huge interest in China about the Briton who selflessly gave his life for the Chinese people. Just one story – but what a story.

So, as China commemorates the anniversary of the end of the Second World War in September, should we not invite our Chinese friends to join us in the rituals at the Cenotaph, to lay a wreath on behalf of our forgotten ally? It would be high time. H

ILLUSTRATION BY **FEMKE DE JONG**

HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on the enduring appeal of archaeological sites

"Nothing beats feeling the earth in your hands and uncovering the past"

IT WAS LATE MORNING, BUT ALREADY HOT enough to warrant wearing a sun hat and sticking to the shade. I was in a quiet part of Andalucía, looking at an archaeological treasure that I visit regularly. However, this time there was more activity than usual. There were scores of people digging, others with notepads, some wearing gloves – all situated in different parts of the site. It was July and students had come from across Europe to take part in excavations.

A 35-minute drive from Granada in southern Spain, the hill town of Tózar is located close to La Ruta del Califato (the Route of the Caliphate). Here, the local council recently purchased the archaeological area from a private owner. Investigations started on the land in 2012 when a Mozarabic cemetery was found. Eighty tombs of Christians who lived under Muslim rule in al-Andalus (the Iberian peninsula) were carved into the rock on the highland projecting into the surrounding landscapes. The site was believed to have been used as a cemetery between the ninth and 12th centuries. If you walk below, archaeologists have found another burial chamber, known as Dólmen Pileta de la Zorra, dating from sometime between the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. There are also remnants of ancient agricultural terraces and irrigation systems.

Further below is a Mozarabic village. I chatted to the lead archaeologist who told me they recently found a small refuse dump, which she excitedly said revealed what people had eaten, the utensils they used, the tools they worked with. Clues of life. And then she led me to what was once a dwelling. In the ground were three small rectangular holes. Two weeks ago, they discovered the remains of a child in one. She says they think these were graves for babies who had died before they had been baptised, which meant they were buried in the home, rather than in the cemetery above. As she spoke, enthused by the find, she described the moment of discovery, and what it could reveal about the practices and beliefs of the past. It raised so many questions from our group: would it not have been hard for the mother to live so close to her deceased child?

And not far away are trenches and fortifications used during the Spanish Civil War (1936–39). Tózar was on the Nationalist side, supporting General Franco. It was a frontline town, where the population would have been constantly aware of the presence of Republican soldiers from nearby Moclín.

In one small place is so much history. Yet very few people know much about it, as it is way off the tourist trail. In the years that I have been visiting, it is now better maintained and looked after, with signs explaining the finds. The University of Granada is now one of several institutions funding the summer dig, and there seems to be renewed interest in the area and in its historical importance.

With advances in digital archaeology such as three-dimensional modelling, the use of databases and virtual reality to aid analysis as well as interpretation, it is an exciting time to be an archaeologist. Applying information technology has, for example, helped in the reconstruction of the Palmyra Arch at the Temple of Baalshamin in Syria. It is also playing a critical role at the site of Herculaneum in Italy, which was preserved in volcanic ash after Mount Vesuvius erupted almost 2,000 years ago. Through the virtual unwrapping of its carbonised scrolls, scholars have been able to work out texts without damaging the delicate artefacts.

But as my adventures in Spain remind me, nothing beats the thrill of feeling the earth in your hands and uncovering a remnant from the past – that magical encounter between now and then.

Kavita Puri is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Her latest BBC Sounds series is *The History Podcast: The Second Map*. She is the author of *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories* (Bloomsbury, 2019)

The landscape around the towns of Tózar and Moclín in Andalucía is rich with evidence of the past, including this defensive fortification, which dates from the Spanish Civil War era

SHUTTERSTOCK

Pure dodecadence?

The Twelve 660's profile is a minimalist 6.6mm. Accentuating its understated elegance is the absence of a date, second hand and luminescent paint. We re-engineered the bracelet. And re-sculpted the clasp, as the original would be taller than the new case. Yet the watch's distinctive DNA remains, in architectural elements like the dodecagon-sided bezel and lock ring. And glass-box sapphire crystals. The rear of which reveals the slim Sellita SW210 manual movement. Made slimmer still with a custom-designed, custom-made train bridge. In summary: same, different, less and more. Decadent design or perfected purity? You decide.

Do your research

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LETTERS

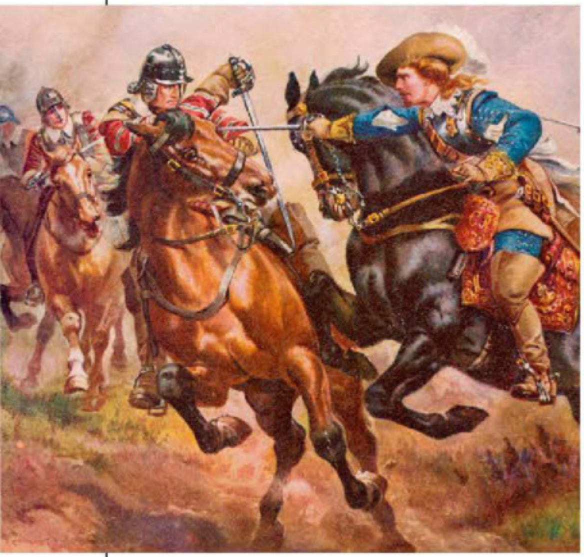
LETTER OF THE MONTH

Historical horsepower

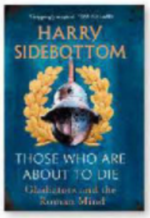
Your interesting feature about the role of medieval warhorses in shaping British history (August) reminded me of a subsequent occasion in which horsepower became a critical factor. In April 1660, with the collapse of republican rule, Roundhead general John Lambert escaped from the Tower of London and called an Easter Sunday rendezvous at the civil war battlefield of Edgehill in a last-ditch attempt to mobilise supporters and stop Charles II taking power.

Only a few New Model Army regiments heeded the call before Lambert, a former key adviser to Oliver Cromwell who had once been tipped to succeed him as lord protector, was intercepted by government troops. Lambert galloped away, but was recaptured when his warhorse got stuck in a ploughed field. The charger had been bred for speed and endurance, not Midlands mud. Lambert, a skilled horseman and cavalry commander, spent the next 24 years in prison until his death at 64.

Stephen Hayward, Wallington



A civil war skirmish as depicted in a c1920 portrait. Stephen Hayward highlights the importance of horses in the 17th century



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new book. This issue, that's **Those Who Are About to Die: Gladiators and the Roman Mind** by Harry Sidebottom. Read our review on page 72

A nuclear necessity?

Any discussion about the use of nuclear weapons on Japan in 1945 (September) must take into consideration the nature of the regime, and the probable results if such an attack had not taken place.

The 1937–38 Nanjing Massacre, in which more Chinese civilians were murdered by the Japanese than died at Hiroshima, plus the 250,000 Chinese civilians killed as revenge for the Doolittle Raid [a 1942 US air attack], indicate the kind of fanatics who controlled Japan. Some of them actually advocated the mass suicide of all Japanese citizens, rather than surrender.

Had the Allies been obliged to defeat Japan with conventional forces, it was claimed that our casualties would have exceeded a million, with Japanese casualties potentially reaching tens of millions. The war may have continued for years, with the final death toll immense.

While costly in lives lost, the nature of the swift end to the conflict certainly led to fewer deaths, and less destruction, than the alternative, given that the Japanese regime would never have yielded without the emperor finally calling a halt in light of the atomic attack.

Colin Bullen, Kent

Network error

'Movie star invents modern technology' (*Anniversaries*, August) is a good story, but [20th-century actor and inventor] Hedy Lamarr's influence on wifi is overstated. The original IEEE 802.11 standard, on which wifi is based, did indeed include her invention of frequency-hopping as one of the alternative ways of transmission – but it was never a commercial success. By the time the wifi specification was first written, it was clear that one of the other alternatives would be successful, so wifi was based on that, and no modern device uses frequency hopping.

Michael Moreton, Cambridge

An overlooked contender

I was disappointed that your feature on Victorian boxing (August) did not mention Thomas 'Pedlar' Palmer. Born in Canning Town in 1876, Palmer became world bantamweight champion in 1895 and lost the title in New York four years later, when he was just 22. It was recorded in my family that my great-aunt's husband, Edmund Henry George Palmer, born in 1880 in Dalston, took boxing lessons from him, the "most infamous of the Palmer clan". My relative thought he was a distant cousin.

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

A very colourful character, Palmer was nicknamed 'box o' tricks' due to his role in a childhood stage act, which he later put to use in the boxing ring. He also earned the 'Pedlar' part of his name from a former life selling wares.

In 1907, Palmer killed a man on a train to Epsom races following an argument, and served five years in prison for manslaughter, never again achieving his former glory. I think he would have made a worthy choice for the feature.

Moira Walshe, Sudbury

Moving stories

I read with interest Kavita Puri's *Hidden Histories* column (August) on the museum of migration. It seems somehow appropriate

SAVE WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TODAY

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Thomas 'Pedlar' Palmer (right) sparring with Ted 'Kid' Lewis, 1923. Moira Walshe makes the case for Palmer as a historical boxing great

that the museum itself had been a migrant, having to set up in a temporary home in a shopping centre. While I'm sure the fact that it has now found a permanent home [at a site in the City of London, set to open in 2028] is a good thing, it's a little disappointing that the museum will become another London-centric institution. I do hope that the new museum will draw on its 'migrant' experience and take opportunities in many of our other vacant shopping centre spaces and high streets to offer temporary exhibitions and cultural experiences – especially in parts of the UK where multi-ethnic communities are sparse and the message is most needed.
Tom West, Moray

Fantastic beasts

The *Q&A?* section of the August issue makes reference to a fictitious account of an animal breakout from Central Park Zoo published by the *New York Herald* in 1874.

What seems so very surprising is that one of the most respected and trusted newspapers in the world chose to deceive and panic its huge readership with a report of a totally imaginary incident, written in such gory and convincing detail that citizens resorted to taking up arms to defend themselves against the supposedly rampaging beasts.

It may also be worth pointing out that the owner of the newspaper was James Gordon Bennett Jr, whose outrageous behaviour often scandalised society – and may well be the origin of the phrase 'Gordon Bennett!' to express total disbelief.
Ian MacDonald, Essex

An exhibition at the Migration Museum in Lewisham. Tom West hopes that the museum offers engagement to visitors outside of London

BBC HiSTORY MAGAZINE

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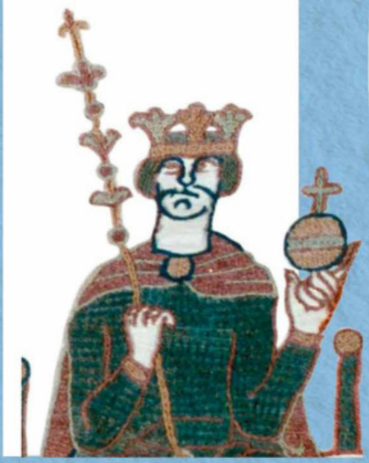

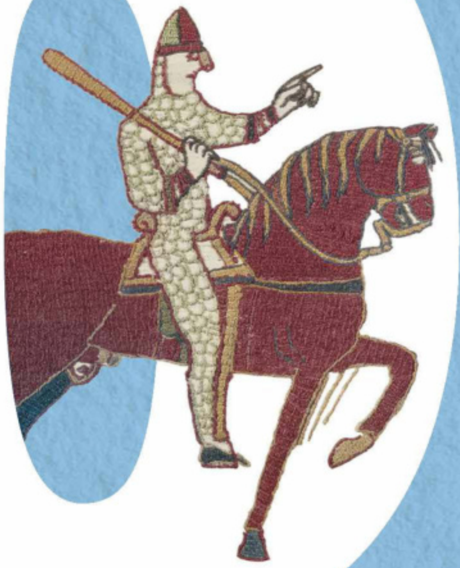

WHO WAS THE

Which of four main contenders for the English throne had the strongest claim? Was it the Anglo-Saxon strongman, the Norman duke, the 'Thunderbolt of the North' or a callow teenager? **Caitlin Ellis** sizes up the rivals

Complements
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ABOVE FROM LEFT: Harold Godwinson, shown in the Bayeux Tapestry; William of Normandy urges on his troops at Hastings, depicted in the same embroidery; Norwegian king Harald Hardrada fights at the battle of Stamford Bridge, in a modern illustration; Edgar Ætheling in a medieval illumination

66

RIGHTFUL KING?

It was a terrible start to an extraordinary year. 1066 was barely five days old when Edward the Confessor, king of the English, succumbed to a short illness and breathed his last. Just a week earlier, crowds had gathered to witness the consecration of Westminster Abbey, Edward's personal passion project – and his final resting place. Now the people of England braced themselves for an uncertain future.

Edward's 23 years on the throne had not been easy. He had restored the English royal line after a period of Danish rule under Cnut the Great and his sons. A political pragmatist, he weathered squabbles among the nobles. He was, chroniclers agreed, a good and righteous Christian. Yet Edward had one huge frailty: he had not produced an heir to succeed him. And that created a power vacuum.

Into that vacuum stepped the dead king's formidable brother-in-law, Earl Harold Godwinson. Initially, Harold had the crucial advantages of physically being in England when Edward died, and of commanding plenty of support across the realm. Among those supporters was an unknown poet who wrote that the Confessor had "entrusted the realm / To a man of high rank, to Harold himself / A noble earl who all the time / Had loyally followed his lord's commands."

In the poet's eyes, at least, Harold was the right man to fill Edward's boots. Of course, in the event it was not so simple – and 1066 proved to be a bloody and momentous year.

The stage was now set for a contest for the English crown between three powerful men and a boy. There was Harold Godwinson; Duke William of Normandy; the Viking king Harald Hardrada; and a young man, probably only a teenager, often omitted from

TOPFOTO/BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY

this story: Edgar Ætheling, Edward's great-nephew. We know, of course, which one of these contenders held the crown in his possession at the end of the year. What is less certain is who was the most deserving.

Debate still rages about what happened on Edward's deathbed. That anonymous poet agreed with one version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that Edward chose Harold to succeed him. *The Life of King Edward*, commissioned by the Confessor's wife and queen, Edith (who was also, it has to be said, Harold's sister), describes Edward stretching his hand out to Harold, declaring: "I commend this woman [Edith] and all the kingdom to your protection." But was protecting the kingdom the same as taking the throne?

Kingmaker's heir

Harold certainly thought so and had himself crowned on the day after Edward's death – the day of the Confessor's funeral. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle remarks, rather ruefully, on Harold's consecration as king of England that "he met little quiet in it as long as he ruled the realm".

Harold hailed from a powerful family. His late father, Earl Godwin, was English but had seized the opportunity during the upheaval following the Danish invasion of England (1013–16) to rise to prominence at the court of King Cnut. Harold's mother was a Danish woman with ties to Cnut's family.

In the troubled period after the death of Cnut in 1035, Godwin was seen as a kingmaker. The family continued to have considerable influence during Edward the Confessor's reign, despite periodic tensions between the king and these over-mighty nobles.

Harold had extensive military experience, scoring particularly notable victories against the Welsh. It's likely that he was viewed as a safe pair of hands by many of the English noblemen who made up the witan, the king's council, which elected him as king.

Yet Harold wasn't the only nobleman with a credible claim to the English crown at the time of Edward's death. Edgar Ætheling was a male heir of the English royal family, the House of Wessex – hence his epithet Ætheling, meaning 'prince, eligible to be king'. As the great-grandson of one Anglo-Saxon king, Æthelred II, and grandson of another, Edmund Ironside, his pedigree was impeccable, too.

Edgar's father, Edward 'the Exile', had been spirited away from England around the time of Cnut's invasion of England in 1016. He ended up in Hungary, where Edgar was born c1052. Concerned for the English succession, Edward the Confessor had 'the Exile' and his family brought back to England in 1057. On his return, 'the Exile' received the approval of the witan – and it seemed, for the briefest of moments, that the succession issue had been solved. But it wasn't to be. Soon after, 'the Exile' died – an event that was, in the words of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, "to the misfortune of this poor people".

What was then planned for that ill-fated Edward's young son, Edgar Ætheling? We know that he remained in England as a possible candidate for the throne, but it is unclear what Edward the Confessor had in store for him. Was he lining up Edgar for the succession? Or did the king fear that it would be difficult to persuade the nobles to accept a young, foreign-born leader?

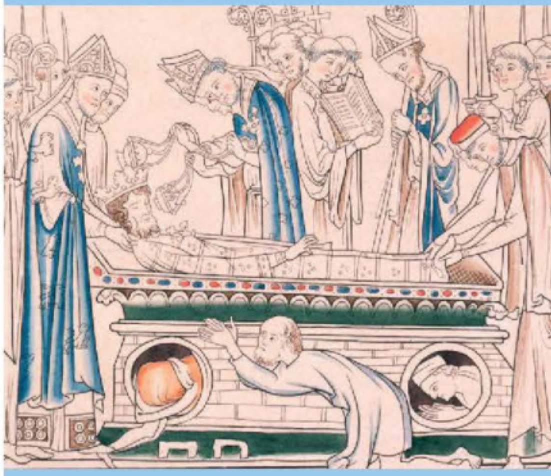
In 1066, Edgar was likely still only a teenager, and presumably in no position to challenge Harold Godwinson's popularity. His lack of military experience would surely also have counted against him, with the English lords perhaps worried about potential invasion. In fact, only after Harold's death at the battle of Hastings did these nobles throw their weight behind Edgar. But their support soon crumbled, and the Ætheling's repeated attempts to seize William's crown all ended in failure.

Short and fraught

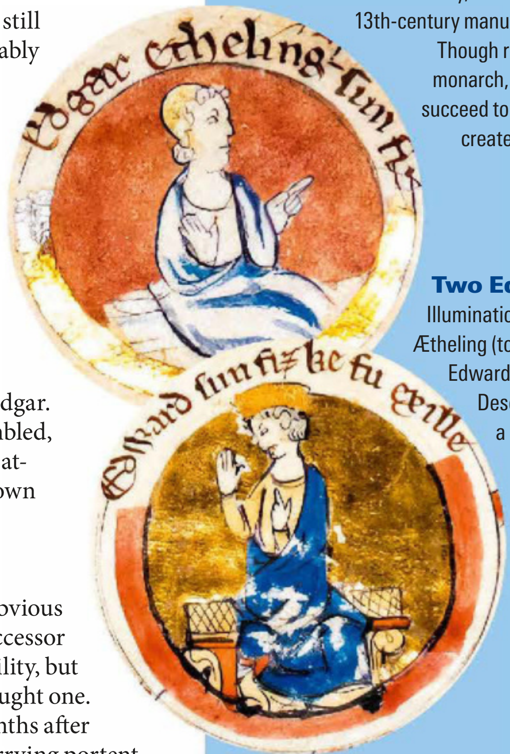
Harold may have been the obvious choice as the Confessor's successor in the eyes of England's nobility, but his reign was a short and fraught one. In April 1066, just three months after Harold's consecration, a worrying portent arrived. As the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle relates: "Then over all England there was seen a sign in the skies such as had never been seen before."

It was a fiery star, which also appears on the Bayeux Tapestry, and has been identified as Halley's Comet. The chronicler John of Worcester claimed that the blazing light, visible for a week, was seen "through the whole world". But perhaps it didn't take a sign from on high to alert the people of England that their country was potentially under threat.

For Harold, when trouble first came it arrived in a shape with which he would have been all too familiar: his younger brother, Tostig. Edward the Confessor had made the younger Godwinson Earl of Northumbria in the 1050s, but Tostig had alienated the locals so completely that they ousted him and sent for another English lord instead. To prevent



Heirless king Edward the Confessor is laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, as shown in a copy of a 13th-century manuscript illumination. Though revered as a devout monarch, his lack of a son to succeed to the English throne created a power vacuum


Edgar etheling sun fiz
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Two Eds better Illuminations of Edgar Ætheling (top) and his father, Edward 'the Exile'. Descended from a line of English kings, both had strong claims to the crown

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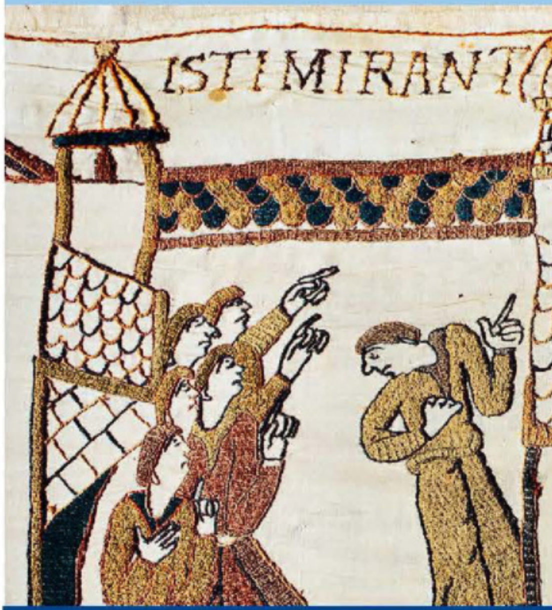
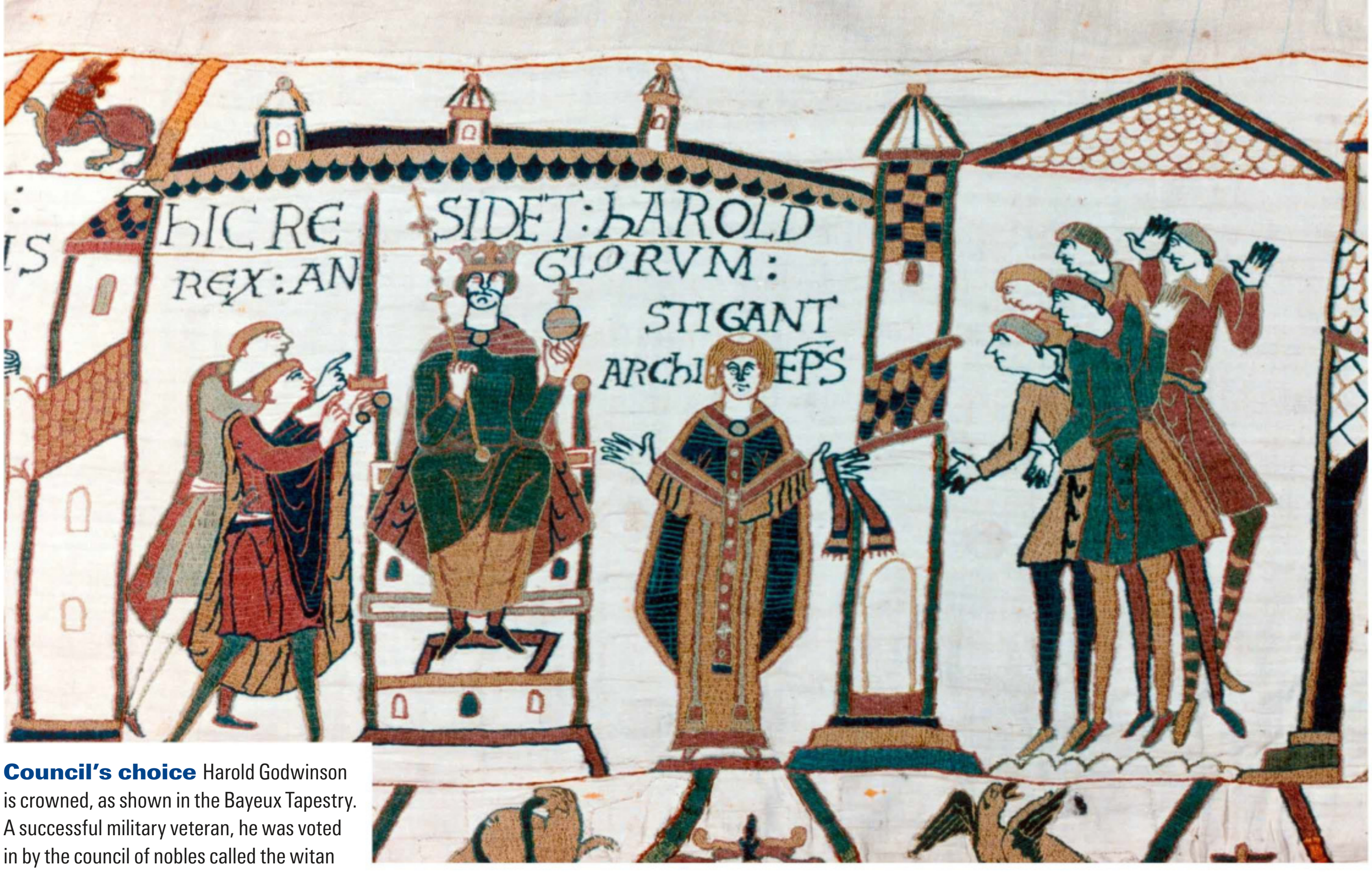




Council's choice Harold Godwinson is crowned, as shown in the Bayeux Tapestry. A successful military veteran, he was voted in by the council of nobles called the witan

TOPFOTO

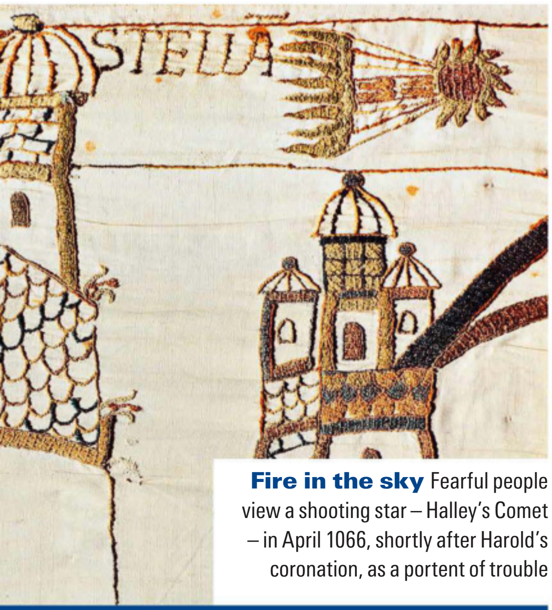
further unrest, Harold and King Edward agreed to the rebels' demands, even though it meant Harold's brother being exiled. Now Tostig was out for revenge.

Might Harold's disaffected brother have had designs on the throne himself? According to *Heimskringla*, a later collection of Norse sagas, Tostig "would by no means suffer to be the underling of a brother to whom he was equal in birth".

In the same work, Tostig is described travelling to Denmark to seek the aid of its king, Sweyn Estridsen, to whom he was related through his mother. Tostig reportedly addressed Sweyn, offering "to give you all the support that I have at my command in England if you will go with an army of Danes to England to win land just like your uncle Cnut". Sweyn, however, knew his own limitations and declined, saying that he did not possess Cnut's martial instincts.

Having been disappointed in Denmark, Tostig now turned to a man who *was* prepared to wage war against Harold, and who counts as the third of our four main contenders for the throne of England: Harald III of Norway, known as Hardrada.

Heimskringla recounts Tostig promising to command the support of all of the leading men of England. The saga depicts him using flattery to persuade Harald: "I lack nothing more in comparison with my brother Harold than just the name of king. Everyone knows that no such fighting man has been born in Northern Lands as you, and I find it surprising that you have been fighting for 15 winters to win Denmark, but you will not take England, which now lies open to you."



Fire in the sky Fearful people view a shooting star – Halley's Comet – in April 1066, shortly after Harold's coronation, as a portent of trouble

It didn't take a sign on high to alert the people of England that their country was potentially under threat

Formidable reputation

Harald Hardrada, whose epithet meant 'Harsh-Ruler' or 'Resolute', had the weakest claim to the English throne of our four contenders but did boast a formidable reputation. He was, in the words of Adam of Bremen, the "Thunderbolt of the North".

Harald's military career had begun early, fighting alongside his half-brother, King Olaf II, at the battle of Stiklestad in 1030, when he was probably still just a teenager. It proved a traumatic experience: Olaf was killed and Harald was forced to flee Norway. After spending some time in the land of Rus' at Kyiv, he went to Constantinople (now Istanbul), where he achieved a high rank in the Byzantine army. His followers there likely formed a precursor to the Varangian Guard – the elite unit of bodyguards to Byzantine emperors, made up of Scandinavian and, later, English warriors. In this capacity, Harald took part in – and even led – military expeditions in Sicily and elsewhere in the Mediterranean.

The Norse sagas portray Harald as not just a skilled warrior but also as a shrewd tactician. One fanciful story tells of him breaking a siege by ordering his men to set fire to wood shavings and attach them to the birds who roosted in the besieged city. The birds' nests, so the sagas tell us, set all the thatched roofs on fire, enabling Harald to capture the city with ease.

On his return to Norway, Harald was able to use the wealth, loyal followers and experience he had gained abroad to leverage his position to co-rule with his nephew – who, conveniently, died shortly afterwards. By 1066, he had been sole king for almost 20 years, and had proved an effective ruler, strengthening the economy and the church as well as eliminating rivals. Arguably, he was the first king of Norway in a meaningful sense.

Did Harald have any right to the English throne, though? The later Norse sagas claim that his nephew and erstwhile co-ruler, Magnus, had made a pact with one of Cnut's sons, Harthacnut, king of England and Denmark. They both lacked male heirs, so – according to the alleged pact – when one of them died, the survivor would accede to the other's thrones. And after Harthacnut died in 1042, Magnus indeed took the throne of Denmark for a time – but not that of England, where Edward the Confessor had himself crowned.

So Harald may have had a tenuous claim to the English throne through his co-ruler Magnus's pact with Harthacnut. But really he was simply being opportunistic in 1066, and would have ruled by right of conquest, like his Danish predecessors had done. As a wealthy kingdom, England was a tempting prize.

According to *Heimskringla*, as Harald assembled his fleet and made preparations for his assault on England, "some said, reckoning up King Harald's achievements, that nothing would be impossible for him, while some said that England would be difficult to defeat" because of its large population and the English king's personal troop of skilled warriors.

As it turned out, the latter was true. Harald's invasion of England got off to a promising start, his Viking army defeating an English force at Fulford on 20 September before seizing nearby York. Yet just five days later, another English army – this one led by Harold Godwinson – annihilated Harald's troops at Stamford Bridge. The 'Thunderbolt of the North' was among the thousands of Vikings to lose their lives that day. And Tostig, Harold Godwinson's rebellious younger brother, was cut down beside him.

Race to the coast

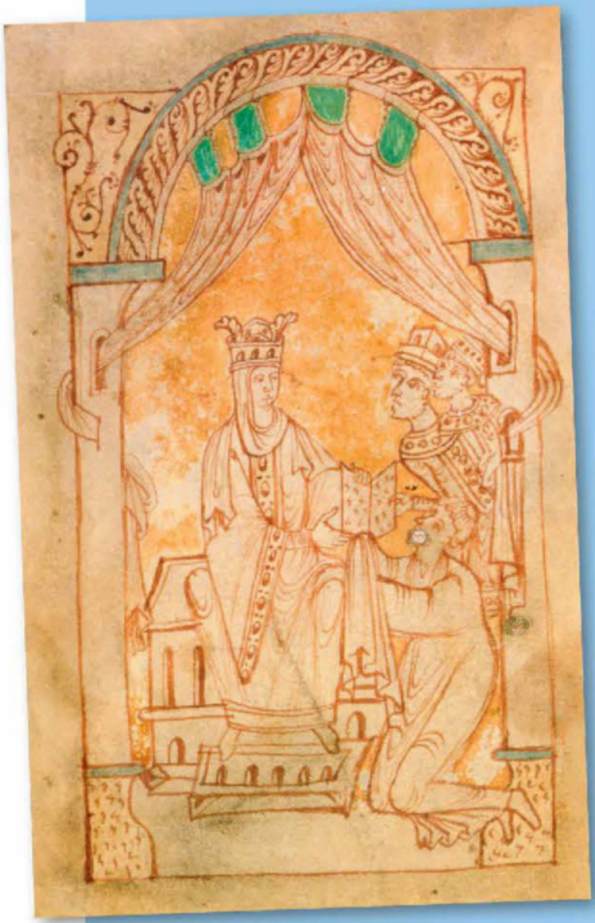
Harold Godwinson had seen off one of the main rivals for this throne. Now he had to turn around, race south and face another. The rival in question was, of course, William, Duke of Normandy.

Normandy ('the Northmen's land') as a territorial entity was only 150 years old. Its roots lay in a grant of land made by King Charles III of the West Franks to a Viking named Rollo, in return for helping ward off the threat posed by other Vikings. Over the years, it had grown rapidly from this initial foothold.

William himself had proved effective at maintaining Norman independence from the French kings, fighting a number of wars on Normandy's borders in the 1050s.

This achievement is perhaps all the more impressive considering the rocky start to William's rule. No sooner had he inherited the duchy from his father, Robert I (Rollo's great-great-grandson), than he had to face down accusations about his legitimacy. His enemies were quick to dub him 'the Bastard', a nickname inspired not by his character

The 'Thunderbolt of the North' was among the thousands of Vikings to lose their lives that day



Pivotal link Emma of Normandy, wife of both Æthelred the Unready and Cnut, depicted in an 11th-century manuscript. She was also Edward the Confessor's mother and William's great-aunt, providing the Norman duke with a familial claim to the English throne

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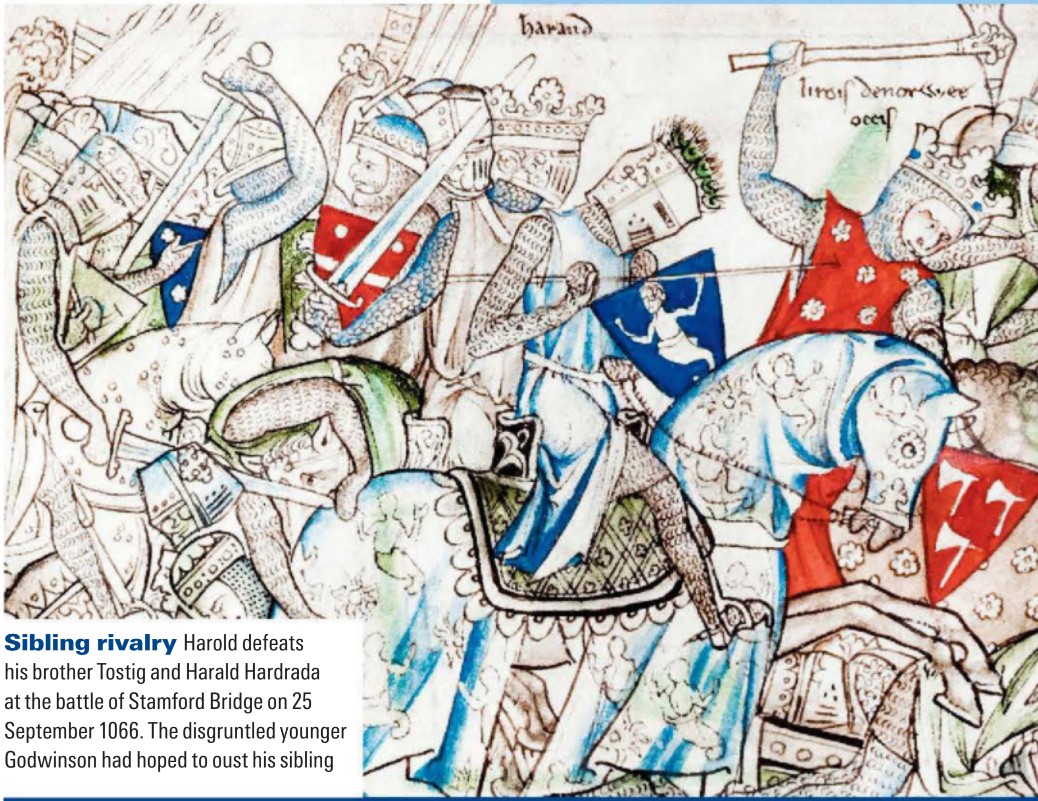
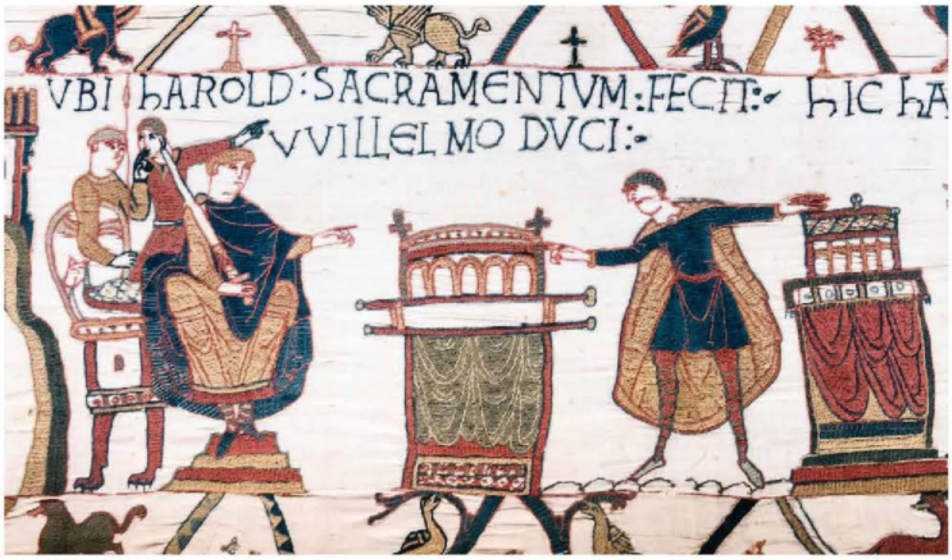


Sibling rivalry Harold defeats his brother Tostig and Harald Hardrada at the battle of Stamford Bridge on 25 September 1066. The disgruntled younger Godwinson had hoped to oust his sibling

Did the pope back William's invasion? Hear Daniel Armstrong discuss this claim on an episode of our podcast at *historyextra.com/1066-pod*



Broken promise? Harold swears an oath to help William take the English throne. This scene in the Bayeux Tapestry is clearly designed to bolster the Norman duke's claim – but is it accurate?

ALAMY

but by the fact that his parents were not properly married, and his mother was of low rank socially. William never quite shook off this insult, but his parents' relationship was not uncommon and William was politically legitimate. There was no Norman heir with a better claim.

But what of his claim to England? William did have a familial link to the English royal family, though he wasn't the direct descendant of a previous English king: he was Edward the Confessor's first cousin once removed through Edward's mother, Emma of Normandy (William's great-aunt). Following the Danish invasion of England, Edward had taken refuge in Normandy with his mother's family, spending his formative years there, at least partly in the ducal court.

So the Confessor's links with Normandy are undeniable – and one result of those links was that the Normans exerted a growing influence on England over the course of his reign. We know, for example, that Edward invited friends and allies from across the Channel to his court. What we can never be certain of is whether – as Norman writers claimed – Edward was so grateful for his Norman family's aid that he named his kinsman William as his successor.

If the truth about the Confessor's intentions have been a bone of contention for nearly 1,000 years, the question of what happened when Harold Godwinson found himself in Normandy in 1064 has proved even more controversial. William's claim on the English crown rested in part on the contention that, while in Normandy, Harold had sworn to become William's vassal, supporting his interests and agreeing to help him take the throne. If Harold had sworn such an oath on holy relics, he would have committed perjury by breaking it when he had himself crowned king of England

Harold was indeed in Normandy that year – as depicted in a famous scene from the Bayeux Tapestry – probably to secure the release of English hostages. Yet the precise details of what happened while he was there remain shrouded in mystery. An English monk, Eadmer, wrote that Harold had been forced to make the oath after being captured. So, after he was free and back safely in England, he did not consider himself bound to it.

The Norman apologists for William's conquest are, of course, at pains to cast Harold in a bad light. One of these, William of Poitiers – the duke's chaplain and, perhaps, personal confessor – put great emphasis on the critical oath and its supposedly voluntary nature.

"Harold swore fealty to him according to the holy rite of Christians," wrote the cleric. "And, as the most truthful and distinguished men who were there as witnesses have told, at the crucial point in the oath he clearly and of his own free will pronounced these words that as long as he lived he would be the vicar of Duke William in the court of his lord King Edward; that he would strive to the utmost with his counsel and his wealth to ensure that the English monarchy should be pledged to him after Edward's death."

Moral high ground

So, in this battle to capture the historical narrative, who occupies the moral high ground? Surely not the Duke of Normandy. William of Poitiers' use of propaganda to justify the conquest betrays its tenuous grounds.

In fact, as a direct descendant of the long line of English kings, it was clearly Edgar Ætheling who had the best dynastic claim to the crown – but it seems that he was never treated as a serious contender. Birthright was not enough in this instance.

Harold Godwinson was, then, the best placed and most able to rule a realm now as Anglo-Danish as he was himself. His death at the battle of Hastings at the hands of Duke William's soldiers did, of course, put an end to such ambitions.

What made the clashes of rulers in 1066 so fraught and unpredictable was that they were contested by three effective military commanders who would all have made strong kings of England. Writing in the 12th century, Orderic Vitalis reflected on this extraordinary year by observing that: "Changeable fortune often brings a hard and bitter fate to mortal men on Earth, for some climb from the dust to the height of power, others are dashed from great prosperity to groan in the depths of despair."

Vitalis was right. As the dust settled on the contest for the throne, two kings lay dead. Another was crowned as the most powerful man in England. H

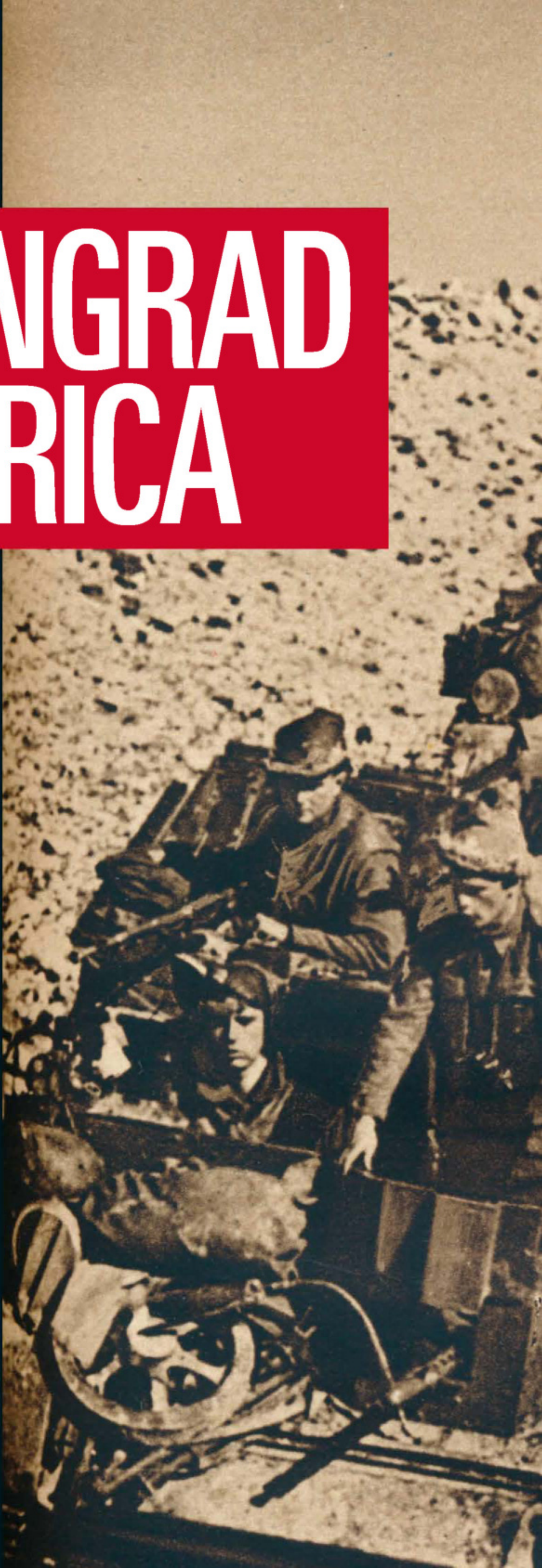
Caitlin Ellis is associate professor of Nordic medieval history at the University of Oslo

Watch **King and Conqueror**, a drama about the contest for the English crown in 1066, on BBC One now

BBC ONE

THE STALINGRAD OF AFRICA

In 1943, Allied and Axis troops contested one of the most decisive campaigns of the Second World War. **Saul David** tells the story of the battle for Tunis – as hard-fought as the struggle for the Soviet city



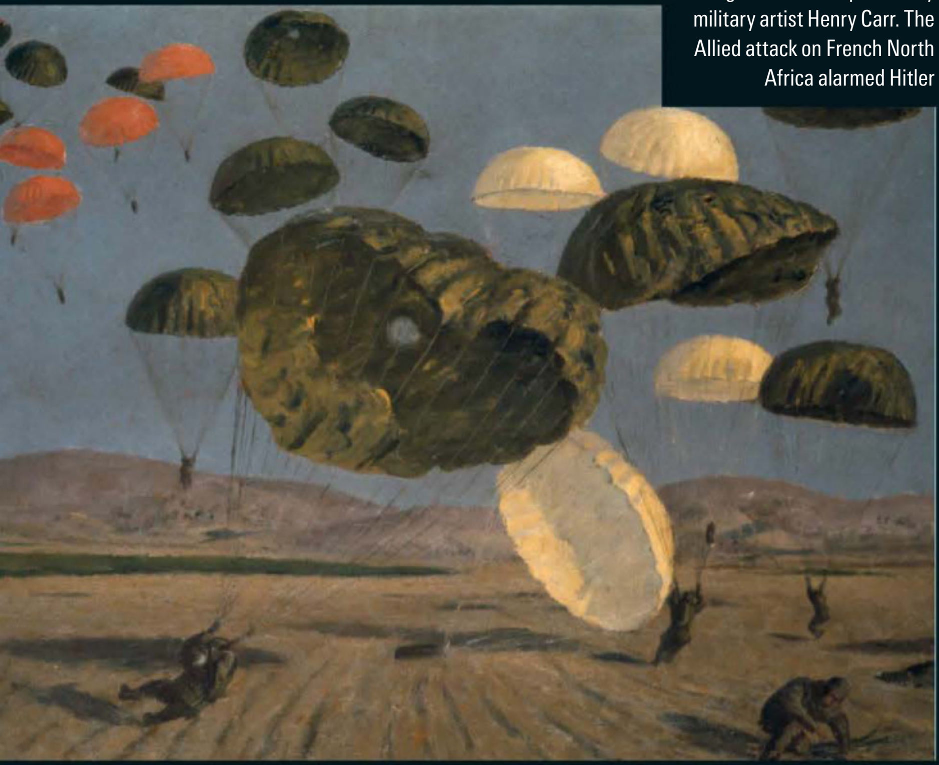
TOPFOTO

Early on 8 November 1942, Adolf Hitler's special train was en route from Berlin to Munich when it was stopped at a small station in the Thuringian Forest to receive an urgent message from the Foreign Office. A day earlier, Hitler's HQ staff had received a "very disturbing signal" from German agents in Gibraltar, informing them that a large Allied troop convoy had passed heading in an easterly direction. Most on the train assumed the convoy was bound for Libya, a colony of Germany's ally Italy since 1912. But its true destination was revealed by the Foreign Office communiqué: "A US expeditionary corps is disembarking in Algiers and Oran," ports in French-controlled Algeria.

Hitler was aghast. Aware that French North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, controlled by the collaborationist Vichy regime) was an area of the "greatest political and strategic importance", he asked his advisors what resources were available to meet the threat. The answer was: none.

Farther down the line, Joachim von Ribbentrop boarded the train. So concerned was the German foreign minister about the news coming from the Mediterranean

FIRST STRIKE Troops of the British First Army in Tunisia, where it spearheaded the 1943 campaign, joined later by the Eighth Army and colonial forces



ALGERIAN AIRDROP British paratroops land in Algeria, 1943, as painted by military artist Henry Carr. The Allied attack on French North Africa alarmed Hitler

that he urged Hitler to put out peace feelers to Stalin, hoping to free up German men and materials to be rushed to north Africa. The Führer refused: "a moment of weakness is not the proper time to negotiate with an enemy."

Instead, Hitler ordered General Alfred Jodl, chief of operations staff of his high command, to "organise the Wehrmacht for the defence of Tunis", the capital of French Tunisia, which was a short flight or sea journey from Sicily. By securing Tunisia, Hitler hoped to stymie Allied plans to trap Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel's Italo-German Panzer Army in Libya between General Bernard Montgomery's Eighth Army, advancing from Egypt in the east, and the forces just landed in Algeria and Morocco to the west. Such was indeed the Allies' plan – and the subsequent 'Race for Tunis' would set the scene for one of the decisive campaigns of the war.

The principal objective

In December 1941, when the US entered the conflict, the strategy agreed with Britain was 'Germany First': win the war in Europe, then deal with Japan. On the question of how to defeat Germany, however, there was less consensus. Prime minister Winston Churchill preferred a 'peripheral' strategy, containing Germany by blockade, bombing, small raids and an attack on north Africa until it was sufficiently weakened by its efforts in Russia for a knockout blow on the continent. US president Franklin D Roosevelt (FDR) broadly agreed, but his Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that only the earliest full-frontal assault on Germany via France would keep the Soviet Union in the war.

The dispute came to a head in July 1942 when the Joint Chiefs told FDR that, if the British insisted on "scatterization" in north Africa, "America should turn to the Pacific for decisive action against Japan". FDR was not convinced and in late July, after more inconclusive talks in Britain, he told his Joint Chiefs that north Africa was now the principal objective, and that an attack would occur "at the earliest possible date".

The fighting in North Africa had begun almost two years earlier in September 1940 when the Italian 10th Army, hoping to seize the Suez Canal and create for Mussolini a new 'Roman empire', invaded British-occupied Egypt from Libya. Defeated by a much smaller British and Commonwealth force, the Italians were saved by the arrival in Libya of the dashing German commander Erwin Rommel and his *Afrika Korps* in February 1941. The contest had then ebbed and flowed as first the Germans and then the British took the initiative. But Rommel's defeat by Montgomery's 8th Army at El Alamein in Egypt on 4 November 1942, after a 12-day attritional battle, was a key turning point.

Four days later, three Allied task forces landed in French North Africa as part of Operation Torch, the largest amphibious operation of the war to date. Commanding the Western Task Force was 56-year-old Major-General George S Patton Jr, a hard-charging tank expert who felt he was destined for greatness. Patton's objectives were three ports on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Despite a number of setbacks – troops dropped late and in the wrong place, and fierce French opposition – Patton

General Alfred Jodl (centre), Hitler's chief of operations staff who masterminded the German defence of Tunis

Dropped behind enemy lines on a poorly planned mission, Frost and his men suffered heavy casualties

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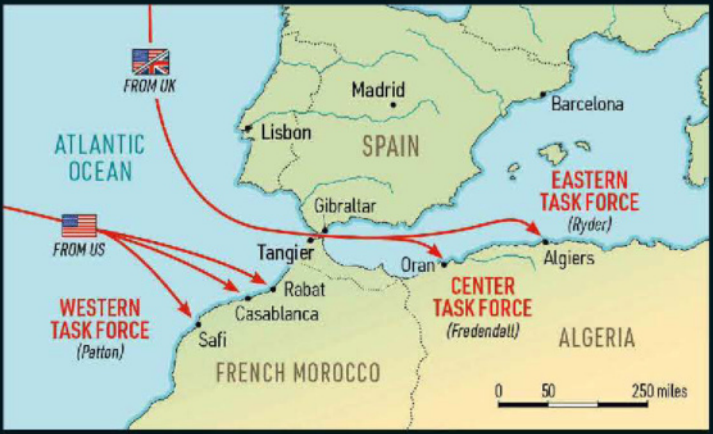
TURNING POINT German and Italian troops surrender after the Allied counterattack in the Kasserine Pass in early 1943 – a turning point that would lead to more Axis defeats

Operation Torch, 8 November 1942


FROM UK
Madrid
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Gibraltar
FROM US
Tangier
Oran
Algiers
Rabat
WESTERN TASK FORCE (Patton)
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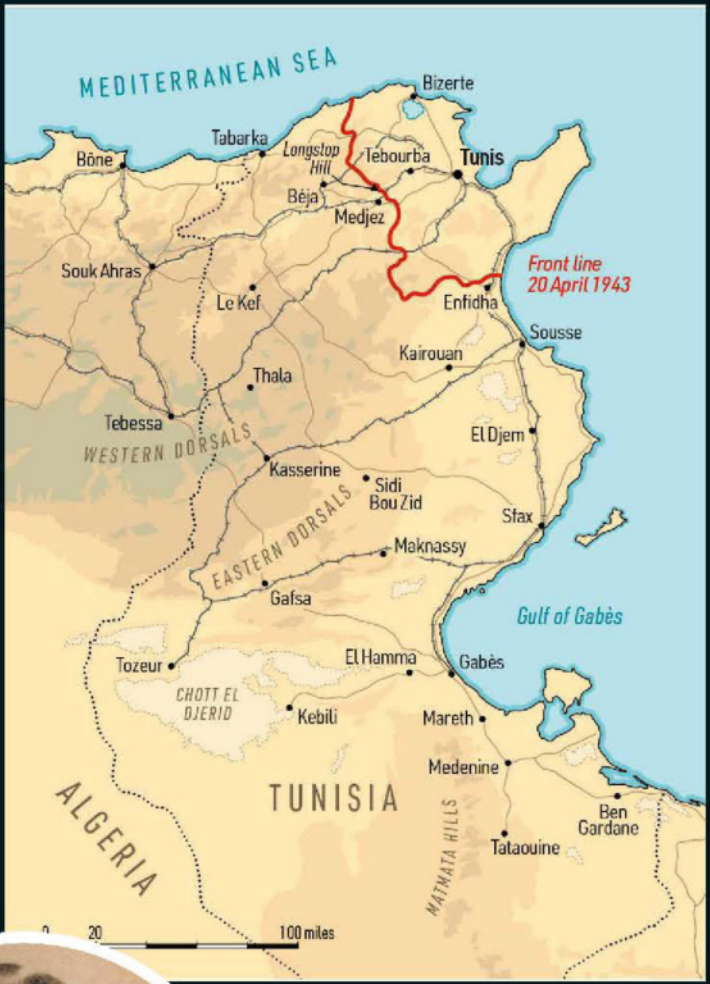
The Tunisian battleground


MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Bizerte
Tabarka
Longstop Hill
Tebourba
Tunis
Bône
Béja
Medjez
Souk Ahras
Front line 20 April 1943
Le Kef
Enfidha
Sousse
Kairouan
Thala
Tebessa
El Djem
WESTERN DORSALS
Kasserine
Sidi Bou Zid
Sfax
EASTERN DORSALS
Maknassy
Gafsa
Gulf of Gabès
El Hamma
Tozeur
Gabès
CHOTT EL DJERID
Kebili
Mareth
Medenine
TUNISIA
ALGERIA
Ben Gardane
MATMATA HILLS
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0
20
100 miles

MAPS BY **PAUL HEWITT / BATTLEFIELD-DESIGN.CO.UK**

kept his cool and, having landed by small boat, took personal charge of the operation. “God was very good to me today,” he noted in his diary.

Vichy French forces put up a stern fight at Oran and Algiers, and Allied attempts to capture the two ports in surprise attacks from the sea were repulsed bloodily. But on 10 November, with defeat inevitable, the French authorities – led by Admiral François Darlan, head of all Vichy armed forces – agreed to a ceasefire. That was too late to prevent German and Italian planes and troops from making the short hop across the Mediterranean from Sicily to forestall an Allied takeover of Tunisia.

The subsequent ‘Race for Tunis’ was contested by the vanguard of Lieutenant-General Kenneth Anderson’s First Army and a 15,000-strong Axis force under Generalleutnant Walther Nehring. Anderson, a dogged Scotsman with thin lips and unkempt grey hair, hoped to advance eastwards on two main roads from Algeria to northern Tunisia and capture the ports of Bizerte and Tunis. But Anderson’s British and American armoured columns were harassed by German planes, which had local air superiority, and held up by bad weather and strong German resistance to the west. Attempts were made to outflank the German defences using airborne troops and Commandos, but these were launched too late, and failed.

The experience of the 600-strong British Second Parachute Battalion, led by 29-year-old Lieutenant-Colonel John Frost (who later won renown for his exploits at the battle of Arnhem), was typical. Dropped behind enemy lines on a poorly planned mission to destroy German planes before linking up with an Allied armoured thrust towards Tunis, Frost and his men were left without support and suffered heavy casualties as they

TOPFOTO

Lieutenant-General Kenneth Anderson, who headed up the First Army in Tunisia

TIMELINE
Victory in north Africa

British troops land near Algiers in November 1942, marking the start of the Tunisian campaign

8–10 November 1942
The Allies unleash Operation Torch. Three task forces land in Vichy-controlled French North Africa and, after a fierce but brief struggle, capture the ports of Casablanca in Morocco, and Oran and Algiers in Algeria

15 November–6 December 1942
Led by Lieutenant General Kenneth Anderson, the British First Army narrowly fails in its attempt to reach and capture Tunis, the Tunisian capital, before enough Axis troops are in place to stop it

22–25 December 1942
A brutal see-saw contest for Longstop Hill, a strategically vital area of high ground en route to Tunis, ends with German troops in possession

14–24 January 1943
American and British leaders meet at the Casablanca Conference (above) in French Morocco. Winston Churchill persuades President Franklin D Roosevelt to delay the cross-Channel invasion until 1944. British General Sir Harold Alexander is appointed deputy to US Lieutenant General Dwight D Eisenhower in Tunisia

14–16 February 1943
Operation Spring Wind sees Axis troops score a spectacular victory as four battle groups from Generaloberst Hans-Jürgen von Arnim's Fifth Panzer Army surge out of mountain passes in the Eastern Dorsal and, in a double pincer attack, destroy elements of two US divisions near Sidi Bou Zid

battled their way to safety. Anderson praised their "epic adventure and great physical endeavour", but that was little consolation for Frost, whose battalion had been "cut to pieces" on a pointless venture.

On 14 December, Anderson informed General Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that his American troops were "green" and "unwilling to listen to advice", and that prospects of getting to Tunis "before the heavy rains and before the Hun gets stronger than I am" were tiny. He made no mention of his own weaknesses, which included a tangled, inadequate command structure, headquarters too far from the scene of battle and a failure to intervene decisively when disaster beckoned.

Setback at Longstop

Prodded by his American superior – Lieutenant General Dwight D 'Ike' Eisenhower, a brilliant organiser with a "sharp, orderly mind" – Anderson made one last attempt to capture Tunis before Christmas, launched on 22 December. Despite rain and insufficient air cover, it made good progress up the lower ridges of the 275-metre-tall Longstop Hill guarding the river corridor from Medjez to Tebourba and on to Tunis. But poor intelligence failed to identify a second area of high ground and, after three days of bitter hand-to-hand fighting by British and US troops, and with ammunition running low, the Allies withdrew to Medjez. "We took Longstop three times," noted a bitter American casualty, "but the Germans took it four."

By now, the opposing forces had swelled to 134,000 Allies – 54,000 British, 73,800 Americans and 7,000 French – and 195,000 Axis troops (though 70,000 were service rather than combat) renamed the Fifth Panzer Army and commanded by Generaloberst Hans-Jürgen von Arnim, who had replaced Nehring. The Allies used substantial air and sea forces to try to throttle Axis reinforcements. Because Tunis and Bizerte were less than 150 miles from ports and airfields in western Sicily, though, it was difficult to intercept Axis transports, and by late January 1943 a total of 243,000 men and 870,000 tonnes of supplies had reached Tunisia.

As the battle raged, Allied leaders met at Casablanca to discuss strategy. Again, Churchill persuaded FDR to delay the cross-Channel invasion – this time because of a slower than expected build-up of forces and a shortage of landing craft. Instead, the next target would be Sicily: to safeguard Mediterranean shipping, tie down German troops, threaten mainland Italy and perhaps drive that Axis partner out of the war.

Also at Casablanca, Ike was warned that his "neck was in a noose" if he did not conquer north Africa quickly. To assist him, General Sir Harold Alexander ('Alex') was given command of land operations, leaving Ike to solve "political and inter-Allied problems". Alex's strategy was to link up Anderson's First Army with Montgomery's Eighth Army which, since its victory at El Alamein in Egypt in early November

'Ike' Eisenhower (centre) with fellow Allied generals Alexander (left) and Patton, March 1943

GETTY

In just eight days, the Axis forces had advanced up to 80 miles and destroyed nearly 200 tanks

German tanks in the Tunisian desert, 1943. Following initial successes, German panzer divisions increasingly met unyielding Allied forces

British troops dash past a German tank during the decisive battle of Medenine, March 1943

Maresciallo d'Italia Giovanni Messe arrives at a British prisoner-of-war camp after his army's surrender on 13 May 1943, cementing the final Allied victory in north Africa

15–22 February 1943

German Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel (right) sends his panzers through the Kasserine Pass in the Western Dorsal in a bid to disrupt the Allied rear, but the attack runs out of steam in the face of dogged Allied defence, and Rommel is forced to withdraw his troops

6 March 1943

Rommel's final battle in north Africa – fought at Medenine in Tunisia – ends in disaster as his attacking panzers are stopped in their tracks by the well-placed anti-tank guns, artillery and tanks of General Bernard Montgomery's Eighth Army

6–7 April 1943

Monty's frontal attack on the First Italian Army's strong position at Wadi Akarit, in the Gabès gap, seems doomed to failure until the veteran Fourth Indian Division breaks through on the left, a significant development that enables the First and Eighth Armies to join forces

6–7 May 1943

Operation Strike, a brilliantly planned offensive that uses a combination of armour, infantry and artillery, sees Allied troops punching a hole through Axis defences and reaching Tunis in just two days

13 May 1943

Maresciallo d'Italia Giovanni Messe's First Italian Army surrenders to the British X Corps. They are the last of 250,000 German and Italian troops to become PoWs – the Allied victory in north Africa is now complete

1942, had pursued the remnants of Rommel's Panzer Army more than 1,000 miles to Tunisia's southern border.

Before the junction could take place, however, the German theatre commander, Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring, ordered Rommel and von Arnim to attack and defeat the two converging Allied armies one after the other, beginning in the mountains of central Tunisia where Anderson's defensive line was at its thinnest. "After Stalingrad, our nation is badly in need of a triumph," said Kesselring.

At this point, Axis troops were holding Tunisia's coastal plain, while the Allies were strung out along the Eastern and Western Dorsals – two mountain ranges that join in the north but diverge farther south to form an inverted 'V'. The only way of breaking into the Allied position was round its southern tip, at Gafsa, or through a double defence line of mountain passes. The first, Faïd in the Eastern Dorsal, was captured from the (non-Vichy) French on 30 January. Two weeks later, in Operation Spring Wind, four battle groups from von Arnim's 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions surged out of the Faïd and Mazila passes and, in a double pincer attack, defeated elements of the US First Armored and 34th Infantry Divisions near Sidi Bou Zid.

Rommel denied

Rommel tried to exploit this success further south with Operation Morning Air, an advance through the Kasserine and Sbiba passes in the Western Dorsal via Gafsa, and on towards the rail and road hub of Tebessa in Algeria, HQ of the US II Corps. Rommel captured Gafsa and 200,000 tonnes of abandoned Allied supplies on 15 February. But his request to use all three panzer divisions in Tunisia – the 10th, 15th and 21st – for the second phase of his plan was rejected by Kesselring, who also altered the axis of advance: it would now be north towards Le Kef in northern Tunisia via Thala, not east toward Tebessa in Algeria. It was, wrote Rommel, "an appalling and unbelievable piece of shortsightedness" because it meant that, instead of executing a sickle-stroke deep into the enemy's rear, the thrust would be "far too close to the front and was bound to bring us up against the strong enemy reserves".

On 19 February, Rommel's armoured spearheads failed to capture Allied positions in the Kasserine and Sbiba passes. The following day, Rommel renewed the assault at Kasserine with panzers, rocket launchers and five battalions of Panzergrenadiers. They were up against 2,000 inexperienced US troops defending a 3-mile front. Surprised by Germans infiltrating along the heights, the flank company of the US 19th Engineer Regiment was the first to crack, and by 5pm the whole line had disintegrated. Hundreds surrendered, the rest fled, and some 20 tanks and 30 armoured troop carriers were captured, with Rommel marvelling at how "fantastically well equipped" the Americans were.

On 21 February, Rommel sent battle groups north to Thala and west to Tebessa, but both were stopped short of their objectives by stout Allied resistance. Believing the enemy had grown "too strong for the attack to be maintained", Rommel ordered a withdrawal through the Kasserine Pass. He was convinced that, but for Kesselring's caution, they might have been able to "thrust far beyond" Tebessa to the north before meeting any serious opposition. In just eight days, the Axis forces had advanced up to 80 miles, taken more than 4,000 prisoners and destroyed nearly 200 tanks. But they had failed to

Rommel in Tunisia, March 1943. He blamed Germany's defeat in Africa on poor strategic decisions made by his superior officers

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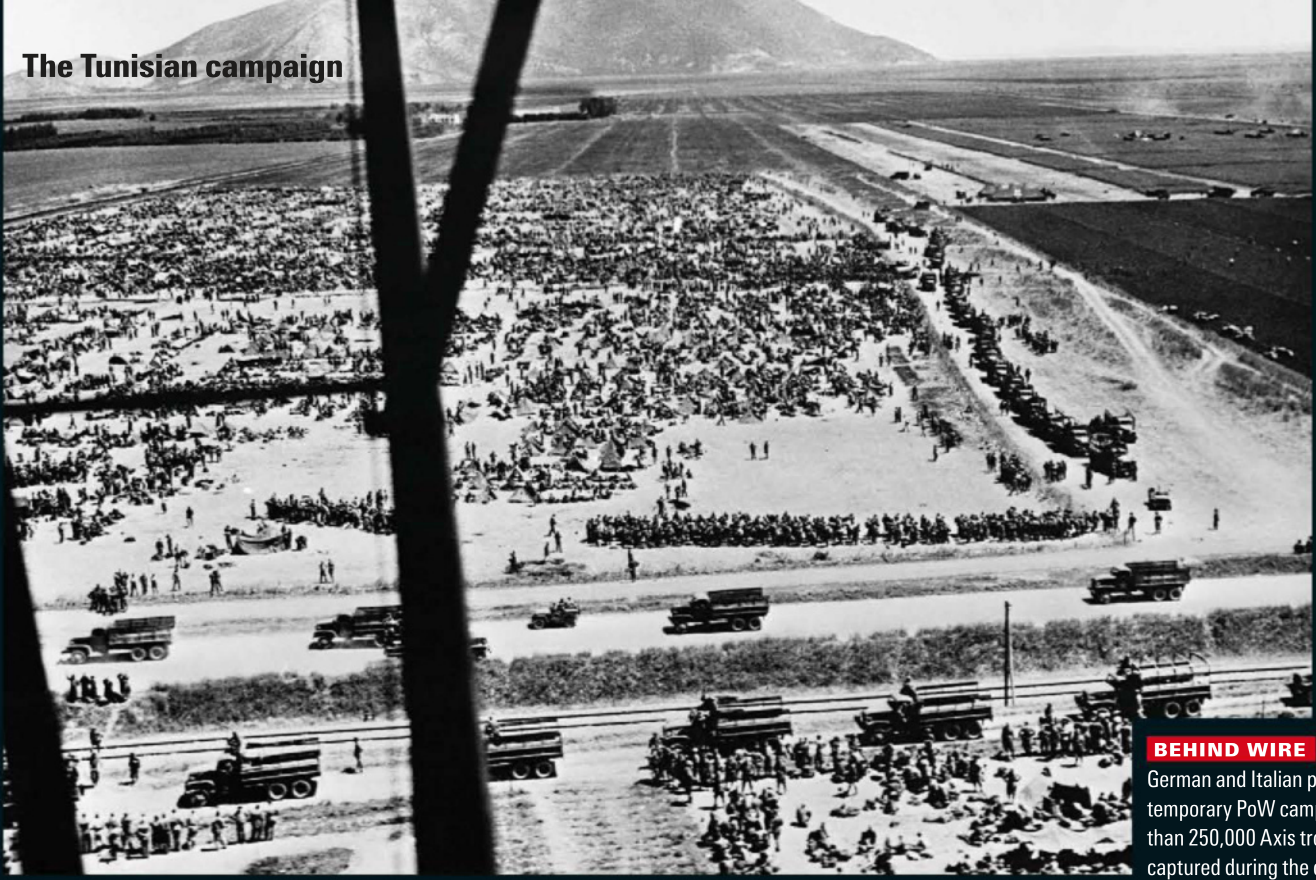

BEHIND WIRE German and Italian prisoners in a temporary PoW camp, 1943. More than 250,000 Axis troops were captured during the campaign

GETTY IMAGES

win a decisive victory – and the tide in Tunisia now turned against them.

Promoted to command the newly formed Army Group Afrika, Rommel fought his final battle at Medenine in southern Tunisia on 6 March. He attacked Montgomery's veteran Eighth Army from three directions with all his remaining armour – 160 panzers – but was stopped in his tracks by well-sited anti-tank guns, artillery and tanks. "Rommel absolutely bought it yesterday," Monty crowed to Alex on 7 March. "He lost over 30 tanks knocked out, many more hit and damaged."

On 9 March, convinced that the campaign was lost, Rommel flew to Hitler's southern Werwolf HQ, at Vinnitsa (now Vinnytsia) in Ukraine, to persuade the Führer to withdraw all Axis forces from Tunisia before it was too late. Hitler, basking in the glow of Generalfeldmarschall von Manstein's successful counter-offensive against the Soviets at Kharkiv (which put a temporary halt to the retreat after Stalingrad), said no. Tunis, he declared, "is a strategic position of the first order. It is of decisive importance for the outcome of the war, and all available resources must be used to hold it." Rommel was sent to a sanatorium to recover his health, never to return to north Africa.

Axis fate sealed

There were more tough battles ahead, but the fate of the Axis garrison – now commanded by von Arnim – was sealed. Tunis finally fell on 7 May, following a brilliantly planned two-day Allied offensive known as Operation Strike. This assault deployed armour, infantry, artillery and tactical air support in overwhelming force to punch a hole through the Axis defences in the Medjerda valley and reach the French Tunisian capital in just two days.

The end came on 13 May: Maresciallo d'Italia Giovanni Messe surrendered the remnants of his First Italian Army to Bernard Freyberg, commander of the British X Corps, north of Enfidaville (now Enfidha). Von Arnim and his staff had been captured a day earlier. "Sir, we are masters of the north African shores," Alex reported to Churchill, who was ecstatic: "We have struck a blow equal to Stalingrad," he told the US Congress on 19 May.

For the Western Allies, the scale of the Tunisian victory was unprecedented. At a cost of just over 70,000 casualties – including 10,000 dead – they had captured more than a quarter of a million Axis troops. The victory "signified to friend and foe alike", wrote Ike, "that the Allies were at last upon the march". It also welded together a team of Allied commanders – including Ike himself, Patton, Omar N Bradley, Alex, Monty and Arthur Coningham – that would go on to direct all major Allied operations in the Mediterranean and Europe for the rest of the war.

With Stalingrad in Russia and Guadalcanal in the Pacific, the battle for Tunisia was one of three Axis defeats in 1943 that changed the course of the war. Historians have recognised the significance of the others, but Tunisia is often either ignored or characterised as a sideshow. Yet it ended Axis seapower in the Mediterranean and destroyed more than 2,400 Axis aircraft, 40 per cent of the Luftwaffe's strength. More German and Italian troops were captured in Tunisia than at Stalingrad. Such was the scale of the defeat that the German public dubbed it 'Tunisgrad'.

Ultimately, the catastrophe led to the dissolution of the German-Italian Axis in Europe. For Hitler, it was the beginning of the end. H

The battle for Tunisia was one of three Axis defeats in early 1943 that changed the course of the war

Saul David is a historian and broadcaster. His latest book, *Tunisgrad: Victory in Africa*, is published by William Collins on 11 September

Listen to an episode of BBC World Service's **Witness History** telling the story of the Tunisian campaign through the experiences of a soldier who fought in it: *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3ct4x78*

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HOSTED AT Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

Gray Barker
UFO conspiracy theorist

Tales of alien sightings and government cover-ups have captured American imaginations for decades – but few with such global appeal as the Men in Black. **DAVID CLARKE** introduces the ufologist who popularised these shadowy space-age legends

One night in 1953, three mysterious men sporting black suits reportedly arrived uninvited at the home of Albert K Bender in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The menacing trio, who reportedly identified themselves as agents of the US government, threatened Bender with prison if he told anyone about a secret he had discovered – information relating to the source of the flying saucer mystery. They scared him so badly that he was physically sick for three days.

Bender was no mere disinterested civilian. An obsessive ufologist, he was the founder of the International Flying Saucer Bureau (IFSB), the world's first civilian UFO investigation club. Shortly after that ominous visit, and on the orders of those 'secret agents', he shut down the IFSB.

At least one person was both disappointed and intrigued by this development: Gray Barker, only recently recruited as the IFSB's chief investigator and a contributor to its magazine, *Space Review*.

"He was 6ft 4ins tall, with a gentle southern accent and a sly sense of humour," recalled his friend John Keel, a fellow investigator of UFOs and monster stories. "And it can truly be said that he knew too much about flying saucers."

It was Barker's exploration of the 'men in black' (latterly abbreviated as MIB) that had a long-lasting and global impact on ufology and wider popular culture.

Born in West Virginia in 1925, in his youth Barker worked in the theatre industry, then began publishing, writing and editing stories about UFOs, monsters and the paranormal. He graduated from Glenville State College in 1947 – the year in which the phrase 'flying saucers' was coined to describe a formation of strange batwing-shaped objects reported by a private pilot, Kenneth Arnold, in Washington state. Arnold's sighting was quickly followed by the Roswell incident, when wreckage of a flying object was recovered from the desert in New Mexico. This story would later become a central element of the most popular UFO conspiracy theory, which claims that the US government is hiding crashed alien spacecraft.

> Menacing 'agents' travelled in groups of three, wore black suits and drove large, brand-new automobiles

Barker enjoyed blurring the line between fact and fiction, and in his 1956 book *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers* he dramatised and embellished his account of Bender's story to capture the public imagination. It worked: his retelling of the episode launched the legend of the 'men in black' into the paranoid world of ufology at the height of the Cold War.

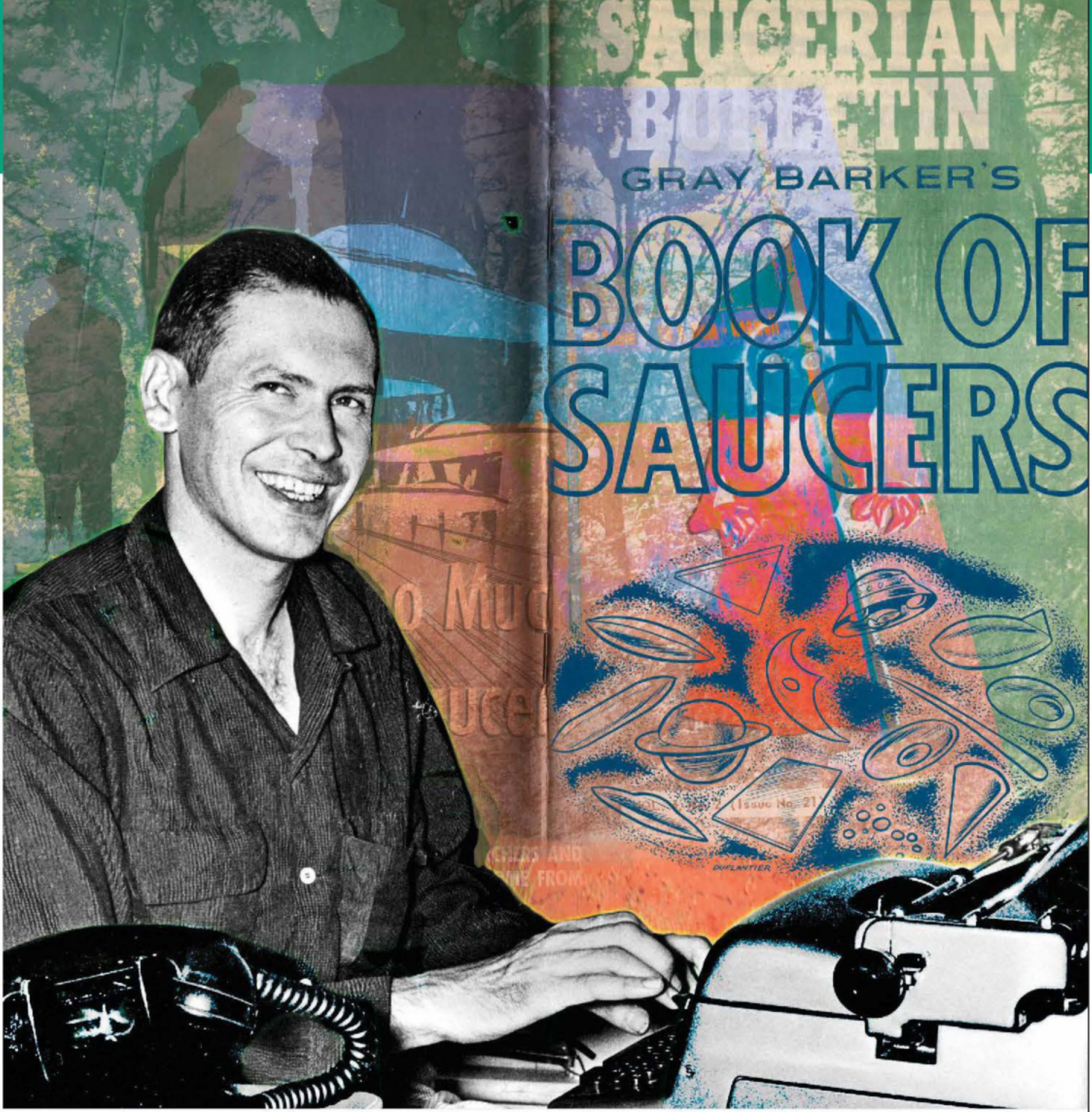
Silent alarm

Written around the time of Senator Joseph McCarthy's infamous campaign to expose alleged communist infiltration of the US government, *They Knew Too Much…* became the best-known title in a series of books that Barker edited and published from his home in West Virginia. The book charted the activities of what he called the 'Silence Group', whom he claimed had warned Bender and other IFSB members to end their investigations. In it, Barker quotes Bender: "Just as the three men were leaving, one of them lingered for a moment and said, 'In our government, we have the smartest men in the country. They can't find a defence for [UFOs]. How can you do anything about it?'"

As rumours about the 'Silence Group' spread following the book's publication, other enthusiasts and people who claimed to have witnessed UFOs came forward, insisting that they'd also received visits from men in black. Like Bender, many appeared genuinely terrified – yet none suffered any reprisals after talking about their experiences. The menacing 'agents' often, but not always, travelled in groups of three, wore black suits and drove large, brand-new automobiles, usually Cadillacs or dark sedans.

Bender's encounter occurred in the same year that the CIA convened a top-secret panel of scientists to decide how to deal with the growing number of unsolved sightings reported to the US Air Force. UFO writer Jerome Clark speculates that the men who visited Bender might have been genuine secret agents who were following the panel's recommendations that civilian UFO groups should be closely watched.

The legend blurred with science fiction in 1962 when Barker published a book, *Flying Saucers and the Three*



TOPFOTO

Writer Gray Barker shared reports of UFOs in his books and journal *The Saucerian Bulletin*, but also "launched hoaxes, joined others' deceptions, and manipulated people's beliefs", according to a friend and co-author

COLLAGE BY **RACHEL DICKENS**

Men, written by Bender – who had now emerged from hiding, and promised to reveal the truth about his visitation. Even the more open-minded UFO believers found it hard to swallow one extravagant addition to Bender's story – an account of his abduction to the south pole by monstrous aliens from the planet Kazik.

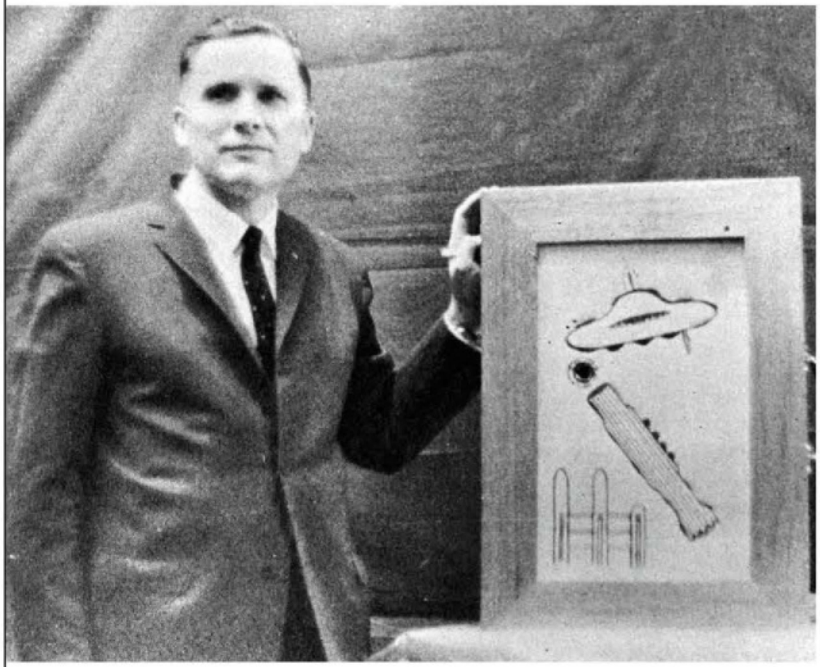
Aliens in disguise

More enticing to the UFO industry was the revelation that the 'agents' who visited Bender were aliens in disguise – a fresh theme that imaginative writers and artists could develop further. Barker continued to promote the legend, alongside UFOs and other mysteries, via the magazine he edited, *The Saucerian* (later *The Saucerian Bulletin*), while rival authors also began creating their own folklore.

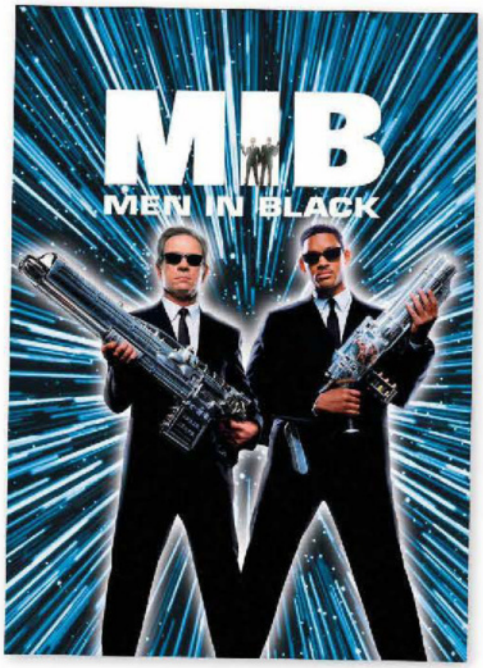
The Silver Bridge, a creative fiction book published by Barker in 1970, linked the collapse of the bridge in Point Pleasant, West Virginia in December 1967 with a frightening creature called the Mothman. His friend John Keel, another occult journalist, expanded on the legend in a book-length account, *The Mothman Prophecies*. Published in 1975, it featured Barker and was adapted into a 2002 Hollywood film starring Richard Gere and Laura Linney. In his book, Keel – the first to use the acronym MIB – detailed visits to the homes of witnesses who had reported encounters with both the Mothman and UFOs before the bridge tragedy that claimed the lives of 46 people.

From the late 1960s, accounts of MIB visits were becoming ever more bizarre and surreal. Stories described MIB moving robotically, or having telepathic powers, odd

Did aliens really land at Roswell?
David Clarke discusses the incident on our History's Greatest Conspiracies podcast: *historyextra.com/roswell-pod*



Albert K Bender, pictured with a sketch of a flying saucer. The visit of shadowy 'men in black' to his home in 1953 sparked the enduring legend that spawned comics and films



Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith play Agents K and J in the 1997 blockbuster *Men in Black*, which was based loosely on Barker's accounts

hairstyles and shaved eyebrows. Their weird demeanour placed them alongside depictions of gangsters, fictional terrorists and spies in contemporary films and TV shows. They resembled, for example, the SMERSH agents pursued by James Bond in novels and films. Meanwhile, MIB links with conspiracy theories were cemented by 'sightings' in Dallas soon after John F Kennedy's assassination in 1963.

Believer or sceptic?

Barker died in 1984, aged just 59, having contracted HIV. A decade after his death, the Men in Black launched onto the global medial landscape. They appeared in *The X-Files* TV series, then the first of four *Men in Black* movies was released in 1997 – the 50th anniversary of Arnold's report of the first 'flying saucers'. Based on a comic by Lowell Cunningham, the first three of these comedy sci-fi films follow the exploits of two agents, played by Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith, who work for a secret agency that polices extraterrestrials living secretly on Earth.

> Gray Barker laid the foundations for the modern belief that the US government is actively involved in a cover-up

Did Barker really believe the stories that he promoted? Or was he purely motivated by financial gain? Evidence suggests that he was a sceptic: he told his friend (and fellow UFO writer) James Moseley that he "pretty much took all of ufology as a joke". After Barker's death, Moseley confessed that in 1957 the pair had written a fake letter, on US Department of State stationery, sent to George Adamski – who claimed to have met aliens from Venus and Mars, and travelled in their flying saucers. The letter appeared to corroborate Adamski's fantastic tales.

In 2002, another of Barker's circle, journalist John C Sherwood, published an exposé that revealed the MIB creator's 'dark side'. "He launched hoaxes, joined others' deceptions, and manipulated people's beliefs," Sherwood claimed in *Skeptical Inquirer*.

Gray Barker laid the foundations for the modern belief that the US government is actively involved in a cover-up. In 2019, a Gallup poll found that 68 per cent of Americans believe "the US Government knows more about UFOs than it is telling us". That came shortly after an online campaign called Storm Area 51, which drove support for breaking into the secret military base in the Nevada desert where many believe the US government is flying captured alien craft.

In July 2023, US intelligence officer David Grusch testified before a congressional hearing that the Pentagon was involved in reverse-engineering non-human spacecraft, and had recovered their dead pilots. He also claimed that people had been threatened and killed in order to conceal what has been called the 'Cosmic Watergate 2.0'. If Grusch is to be believed – and his claims have been challenged by numerous experts – then the 'men in black' are more than a mere fantasy conjured up by Gray Barker. H

David Clarke is associate professor in the Sheffield Creative Industries Institute at Sheffield Hallam University, and project lead for the AHRC funded National Folklore Survey for England

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Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

Did Victorians really eat ancient Egyptian mummies?

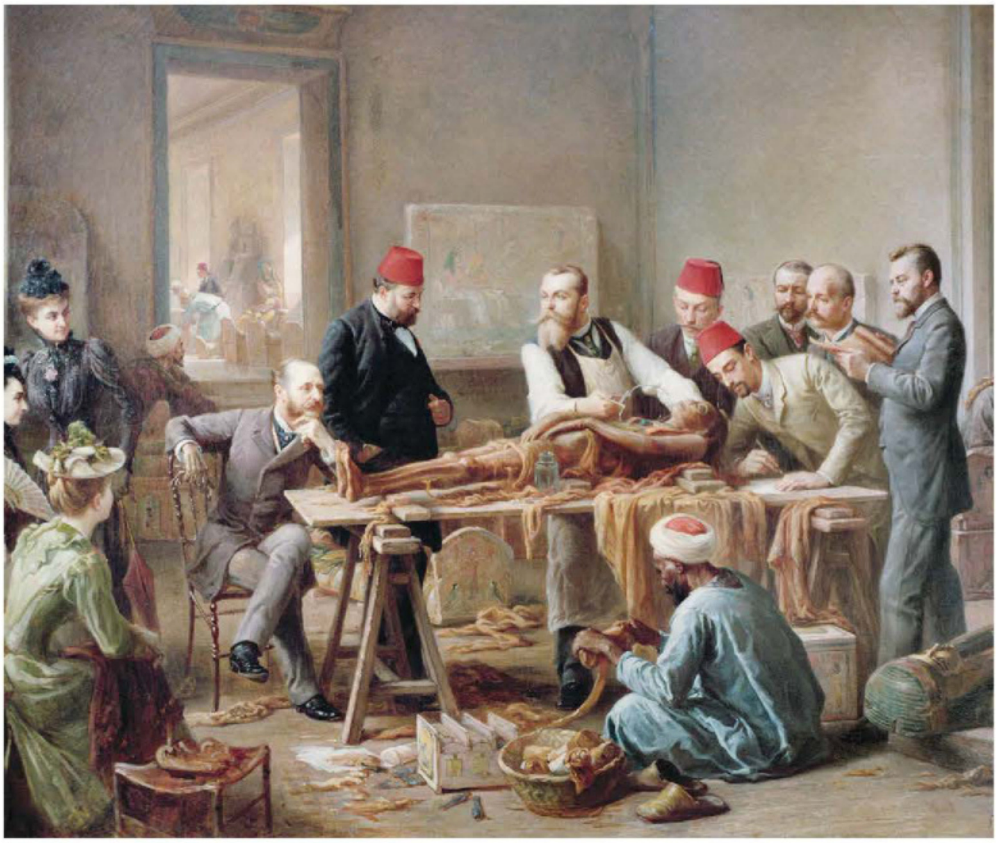
In short, yes: the Victorians did indeed think eating mummified remains pilfered from ancient Egyptian tombs was a good idea, although they did not come up with the idea themselves. The morbid practice had begun much earlier, in the Middle Ages.

At the time of the crusades, Europeans travelled to the Holy Land in large numbers and started hearing about *mūmiyā*, a tar-like substance known in Persia for its healing qualities. Through misunderstandings and poor translations, the belief spread that *mūmiyā* referred to a substance found on mummified bodies and this evolved to mean the actual bodies themselves.

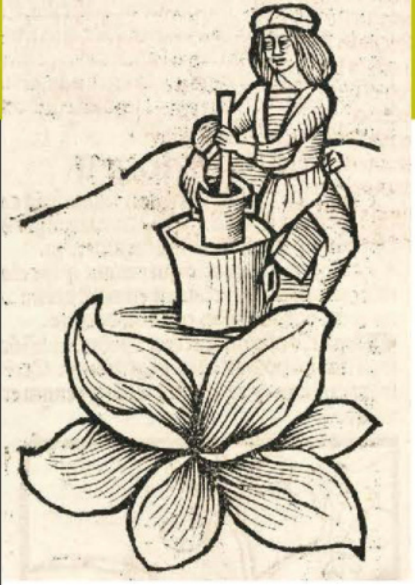
Ground-up mummies, or mummia, therefore became a medicine in medieval Europe: if swallowed or rubbed on the skin, mummia was thought to cure a host of ailments, injuries and diseases, from bruising to epilepsy.

This medical cannibalism peaked in the 16th and 17th centuries, but then found a new audience in the Victorian era, at a time of Egyptomania. Beyond medicine, the Victorians found multiple other uses for the desiccated remains, including fuel and fertiliser, or mulching them into paper or a special type of paint called Mummy Brown.

Jonny Wilkes, freelance writer



Victorian scientists examine mummified remains in this c1890s painting by Paul Dominique Philippoteaux



A woodcut from the *Hortus sanitatis* ('Garden of Health'), printed by Johann Prüss in 1497

What plants were used in medieval first aid kits?

In medieval Europe, nature was a fundamental resource for healthcare. Alongside minerals and animal substances, plants had numerous medicinal properties, harnessed through the expertise of nuns, monks, apothecaries and physicians. There was also much knowledge of plants' healing benefits in wider society, which was activated in kitchens, gardens and other domestic spaces. Plant extracts, from dried leaves to seeds and roots, were incorporated in pills, syrups and plasters, and distilled into medicinal liquids that were imbibed or applied to the body.

Plants were vital ingredients in medicines deployed at moments of extreme danger, such as epidemic illness or blood loss. In an era without antibiotics, plantain, vervain and other plants could reduce fevers. Meanwhile, bugloss, chicory and endive featured in remedies to protect against plague. Women experiencing childbirth complications received drinks distilled from juniper and fern. Along with pennyroyal, these plants were also used to induce abortions.

Many plants were multifunctional, such as fennel, which was an anti-venom, provoked menstruation and lactation, and healed dog bites. Multiple plants were also used in conjunction: rose water, one of medieval medicine's most ubiquitous remedies, was used to reduce the hot properties of plants like calamint, wormwood and anise.

Elma Brenner, editor of *Leprosy and Identity in the Middle Ages* (MUP, 2021)

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

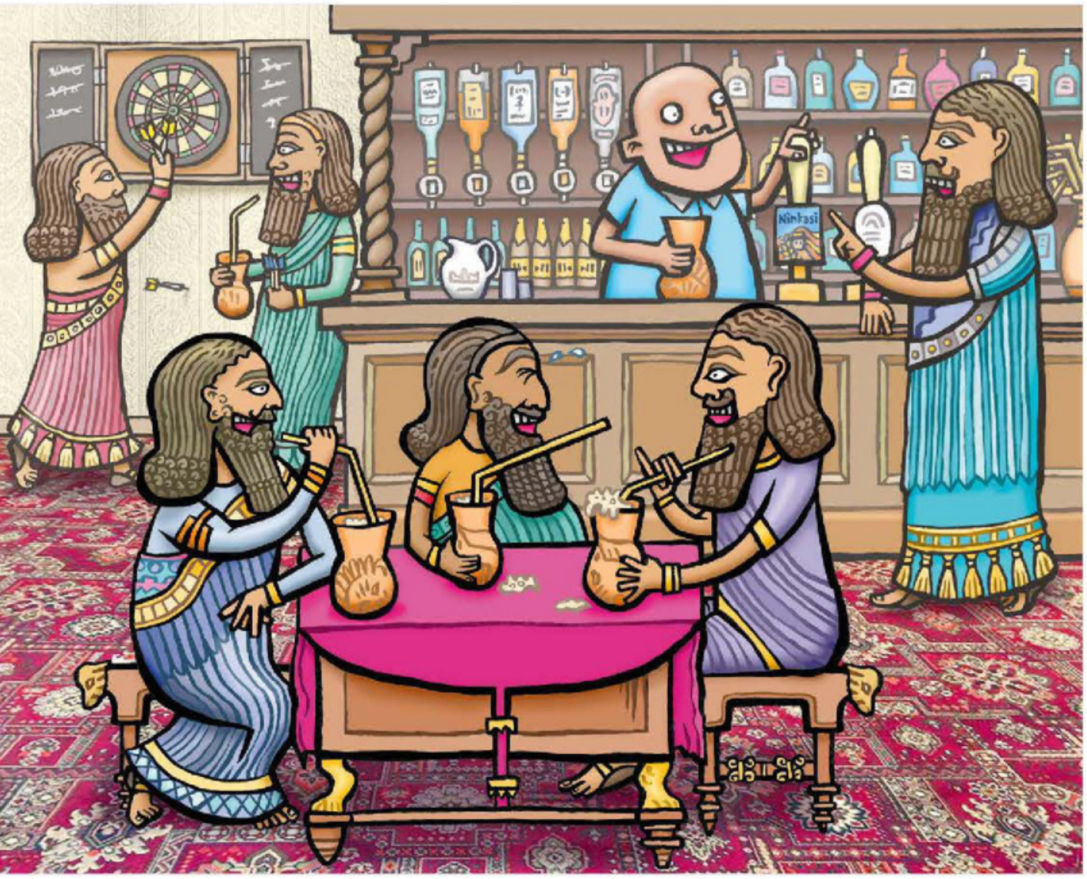


ILLUSTRATION BY **GLEN McBETH**

What was the first ever beer recipe, and how did it taste?

»» When you think of beer, you're probably not envisioning a thick, sour, porridge-like concoction. That's what the ancient Sumerians were quite happy to quaff, though.

We know this because the first known written recipe for beer comes from an ancient Sumerian hymn to the goddess of brewing, Ninkasi, dating from around 1800 BC. The hymn begins: "Ninkasi, given birth by the flowing water," then moves on to describe some of the processes used: "It is you who handle the… dough with a big shovel, mixing… the beerbread with sweet aromatics," the hymn continues.

"Beerbread" is a translation of the Sumerian word bappir: it's thought that bappir was a hard, twice-baked bread made from barley grains, similar to biscotti, though it's also been argued that bappir could refer to sourdough.

"It is you who hold with both hands the great sweetwort, brewing it with honey and wine," the hymn goes on, though it would have been unusual for 'normal' beers to contain honey. Honey was a luxury product, so dates may have been used instead. Also 'wine', in this context, may point to the source of another key ingredient: wild yeast is naturally present on grape skins. The hymn ends with a description of the (not very effective) filtering process: "You place the fermenting vat, which makes a pleasant sound, appropriately on top of a large collector vat."

What may have been less pleasant was the experience of actually drinking the finished product: a straw was needed to avoid floating deposits such as grain husks. But what did it taste like?

Holden Wilson, a history enthusiast and chef who tried to recreate the recipe in 2018, described it as "not unpleasant", adding it was more like cider than beer. It was a pale brew, about 2% ABV, with a thick sediment. Perhaps not the refreshing pint of ice-cold lager you or I might enjoy on a hot day, then – but no doubt a nourishing pick-me-up after a long day tilling the fields of Mesopotamia.

Hilary Mitchell, freelance writer

DID YOU KNOW…?

Bless you!

In ancient Greece, sneezing was often considered to be a good omen sent by the gods. In Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, Odysseus's wife Penelope, awaiting her husband's long-delayed return from Troy, curses the suitors who have taken up permanent residence in her home, pestering her with their advances. Her son Telemachus sneezes after her speech and Penelope laughs in delight, believing this to be a sign that soon Odysseus will return and the suitors will all die at his hand.

Fixed fight?

Wyatt Earp, legend of the American West, refereed a controversial world championship boxing match 15 years after the famous 'Gunfight at the OK Corral'. Earp presided over a fight in San Francisco between Bob Fitzsimmons and Tom Sharkey that was billed as a world heavyweight title bout. The match ended when Earp hailed Sharkey as the victor, claiming that Fitzsimmons had felled his opponent with a foul punch, but many believed that the fight had been fixed.

Too sweet for war

At one point in the Second World War, the BBC refused to broadcast certain popular songs because they were said to be too sickly sentimental, and thought to be weakening morale both at home and among the troops abroad. A Dance Music Policy Committee gave the thumbs down to songs by Bing Crosby and other crooners. Not even 'forces' sweetheart' Vera Lynn was immune from criticism and her radio show 'Sincerely Yours' was temporarily suspended, only to be reinstated by popular demand.

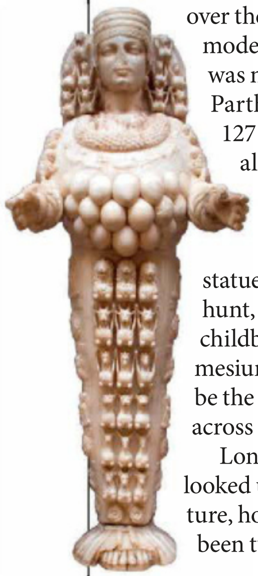
Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history

Vera Lynn, 1940. Even "the forces' sweetheart" wasn't immune to censorship

GETTY IMAGES

What was the Temple of Artemis?

⋙ When ancient travellers of the Mediterranean Rim compiled their lists of must-see architectural marvels, which became the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, one landmark that always made the cut was the Temple of Artemis. One such traveller, the second-century BC poet Antipater of Sidon, went so far as to exclaim: “Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand.”



The white marble temple loomed over the landscape of Ephesus, in modern-day Selcuk, Turkey, and was nearly double the size of the Parthenon in Athens. A total of 127 columns ran in two rows along all four sides, many adorned with works of art, and an inner chamber at the centre housed a statue of Artemis, goddess of the hunt, wild animals, chastity and childbirth. Also called the Artemesium, the monument would be the model for Ionic temples across the Hellenistic world.

Long before Antipater of Sidon looked upon this wondrous structure, however, there had already been two earlier temples built on the same site. The first of these went back to the eighth century BC, and according to legend was established by the Amazons before being damaged in a flood.

Then around 550 BC, Croesus, King of Lydia, ordered the construction of a great temple out of marble to honour the beloved goddess. Whereas the Artemis of Greek mythology was a youthful maiden, the Ephesian version was an amalgam of elements from other cultures and represented as a maternal figure covered in oval objects, thought to represent breasts or eggs as a symbol of fertility.

This second temple may well have been included on the list of Seven Wonders, were it not for the intervention of a man named Herostratus. In 356 BC, he burned the temple down for no other reason than his desire to be famous. He got his wish, but at the cost of his life. The Ephesians restored the temple – creating the impressive structure that did make the list of Seven Wonders – and it stood for some 600 years before its final destruction came at the hands of East Germanic Goths in the third century.

Today, the only parts of the temple that remain are its foundations and a single, reconstructed column. ***JW***

The remains of the Temple of Artemis at Selcuk and (above) a statue of Artemis from the temple at Ephesus

pest iuanni de indi

Mythical Christian patriarch Prester John, as depicted on a 1528 map of Europe by Jacopo Russo

Who was Prester John?

⋙ In 1165, the Byzantine emperor received a letter purporting to have been sent by the mysterious ruler of an unknown distant land in the east. Prester John, according to the letter, was a devout Christian and both king and priest of a vast empire where riches abounded, 72 kingdoms lived in peace, and crime and vice had been eliminated. This letter promised a Christian paradise to be explored, as well as the ally that western Europe so badly needed to fight Muslim forces in the crusades. The letter – a fake by a still-unknown author – was widely circulated and the name of Prester John spread.

From there, his legend endured for centuries. Despite the lack of any hard evidence that he existed at all, Europeans latched onto tales coming in from beyond the Islamic world, namely the campaigns of the Mongols, as proof of Prester John’s greatness. Missionaries and travellers, Marco Polo among them, went looking for his realm, but when it became clear that the fabled land could not be found in Asia, the belief shifted to place Prester John in Ethiopia instead. Portuguese exploration of Africa was partly about finding him once and for all – albeit unsuccessfully. ***JW***

ALAMY

Were postcards the world's first global social media?

LA BRETAGNE PITTORESQUE
2044 - La Chèze - L'Hôtellerie des Trois-Piliers et la rue de la Madeleine
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
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POSTES

When postcards first emerged, they offered one of the first low-cost mass communication networks – paving the way for the social media and messaging services of the 21st century

»» They were certainly once as popular as social media is today. Historians estimate that in the first two decades of the 20th century alone, something like 200 billion postcards were in global circulation. Postcards are among the largest set of objects ever made and circulated by humankind.

There are a lot of ways to define the first postcard, but the idea that people would like to send a small rectangle of cardstock with a few lines written on it through the mail can be traced to Austria in 1869. These first postcards – called *correspondenz-karten* – didn't have images printed on them, but the sender could write a brief message, address it, and then put the card in the post with the expectation that it would be delivered and the recipient wouldn't owe any postage.

When *correspondenz-karten* went into circulation on 1 October 1869, some 2.9 million cards were sold in Austria-Hungary within three months. Their popularity quickly spread around the world.

Over the next five decades, postcards gradually became the iconic objects that we know today. One side has a printed image, and the other side is a blank space for the recipient's address, a message and a stamp. Their popularity can be attributed to the connections that postcards created between people and places. This was especially true for early 20th-century tourists, as sending a postcard back home – or simply collecting postcards as souvenirs – became part of people's expectations for travel.

Since the 1860s, the, buying, sending and receiving of postcards has established billions of personal connections around the world. Pick up an old postcard and you can find yourself transported straight back to when the picture on the card was taken, when the card was sent and where the postcard was going. It was part of a massive network that helped establish the expectations that we have of communication networks today.

We see echoes of the power of postcards every time we engage with present-day social networks. Postcards are where it all started.

Lydia Pyne, author of *Postcards: The Rise and Fall of the World's First Social Network* (Reaktion, 2021)

What was Chairman Mao's 'mango cult'?

»» In summer 1968, Beijing factory workers received a strange gift: a box of fragrant mangoes, a fruit virtually unknown in China at that time, sent by Chairman Mao himself. Mao, who had received the fruit from the Pakistani prime minister, had sent the mangoes to acknowledge the workers' role in bringing the Red Guards – the militant youth enforcers of the Cultural Revolution who since 1966 had unleashed destruction and violence across China – under control.

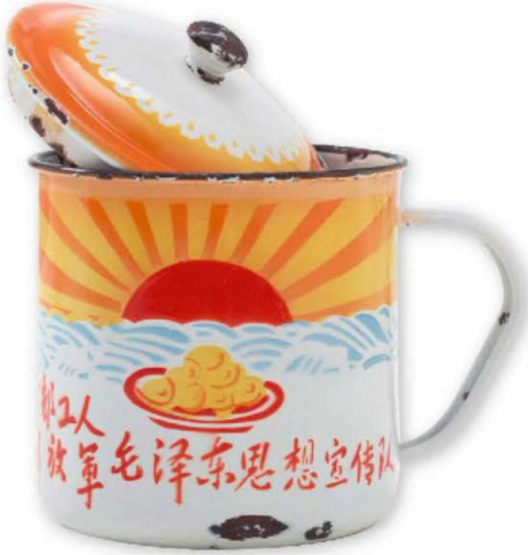
The mango became a cult object. It was placed on altars, with workers bowing as they walked by. The fruit was boiled down and turned it into sacred mango water that was spoon-fed to devotees. Wax replicas appeared, mango poems ran in the state-owned newspaper and mango designs graced cigarette packets and household goods.

Rumours spread that mango trees fruited only once every century, and that the fruit bestowed longevity. Mao's refusal to eat them was seen as proof of his willingness to sacrifice himself for his workers. Unofficially, the mango became a symbol of the new anti-Red Guard policy, which centred the workers as the dominant force under Mao. The fruit's prominence in public discourse reinforced the importance of both Mao and the workers in shaping the new China.

Given how closely the mango was associated with Mao, any criticisms had serious consequences. For instance, a dentist in Sichuan province who remarked that the mango was "nothing special" was arrested as a counter-revolutionary, tried and executed. But a year after it started, the mango cult began to decline, and it ceased entirely after Mao's death in 1976.

Today, the fruit is seen merely as a consumer good, and people in China are more likely to encounter a mango in a smoothie than as a symbol of Chairman Mao's lethal love. H

Christin Bohnke, freelance writer



At the height of China's mango cult in the late 1960s and early 1970s, images of the golden fruit adorned everything from teacups to bedding

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The making of Rome's

Face value Terracotta masks, possibly used in religious or funerary rituals, and glass heads from ancient Carthage. This Phoenician-speaking city in north Africa played a pivotal role in stories Romans told about their origins

monster

In the second century BC, Roman troops razed the city of Carthage and obliterated its civilisation. So why, asks **Eve MacDonald**, did the victors remain obsessed by their conquered foes for the next 200 years?

GETTY IMAGES

Fallen foe A century after destroying Carthage in 146 BC, Rome made the city the empire's main urban centre in Africa, installing familiar elements such as the extensive Baths of Antoninus

Blue period A beaded necklace found in Carthage. Sited at a nexus on the African coast, the city became a prosperous trade hub linking much of the Mediterranean, receiving jewellery, perfumes and other luxury goods from across the region

Carthage burned for six days. After three long years of siege, in the spring of 146 BC Roman soldiers finally broke through the city's defences and began to slaughter the population. But still the Carthaginians resisted. Street by street, they threw themselves at their enemy.

Rome's relentless military machine moved from the city's ports, across the temple-filled marketplace and up the streets that lined the central hill. There they were assailed by projectiles hurled down from roofs by women, children and old men.

Yet the Romans' fierce assault on that already ancient city on the north African coast could not be stopped. They went from house to house, ascending to roofs, rooting out Carthaginians from their hiding places. Houses burned and bodies lined the streets while a unit of 'sweeper' soldiers cleared away the dead to allow access for more troops.

The scene, as told by the Greek historian Appian – in what, it seems, was an eyewitness account – paints a gruesome picture of conquest in the ancient world. It was so brutal, in fact, that the Roman commander, Scipio Aemelianus, had to change his troops frequently, sending in fresh fighters to combat the Carthaginians' desperate attempts to defend their land, their houses, their families, their gods and their very lives.

Those attempts at defence came to nought. The people of Carthage were slaughtered or enslaved, their once-beautiful city left in smouldering ruins on the shores of the Mediterranean. As a result of the destruction, and of the memory of the wars fought between these two ancient superpowers, Carthage became an integral part of the story of Rome and its rise to empire.

Stolen story

The tale of Carthage became a lesson to all those who dared to challenge Rome. Once it had been razed, all that remained of the history of this great city was co-opted by its enemy. The story of those who had built and designed its urban landscape, its technologically superior ports, its defensive walls, and its multi-story houses with indoor plumbing and waters cisterns disappeared. So, too, the memory of its mothers, fathers, grandparents and children – all inundated beneath the tales Romans told of their great victory.

In the centuries that followed, the complex culture of Carthage was largely reduced to a simplistic account of Roman wars. Nonetheless, Carthage and all it stood for became a foundational part in the Roman story. The victors believed that, in defeating the Carthaginians, Rome had become the imperial power it is still renowned as today. That view is clear in the comments of the Roman historian Livy, writing well over 100 years after the fall of Carthage – and following many other wars – who remembered the events of the second conflict between the two powers (218–201 BC) as "the most memorable war ever fought".

Carthage was a melting pot of cultures where north Africans, Greeks, Phoenicians and others lived and intermarried

But who were the Carthaginians? We remember very few of its citizens, even though their city had stood on the north coast of Africa – its ruins now preserved just east of Tunis – for over 600 years before its destruction. Thanks to its location and rich agricultural land, Carthage was prosperous, and its influence stretched across the central and western Mediterranean, a thriving hub with connections to east and west.

The city was founded by Phoenician-speaking people in the ninth century BC – and the story of that genesis is intertwined with Roman myths of their own civilisation's origins. In particular, one recounted by the poet Virgil (70–19 BC) told of a famous queen named Dido, who tempted the Trojan hero Aeneas and played the femme fatale in the epic story of Rome's foundation. Born a Phoenician princess named Elishat, Dido had

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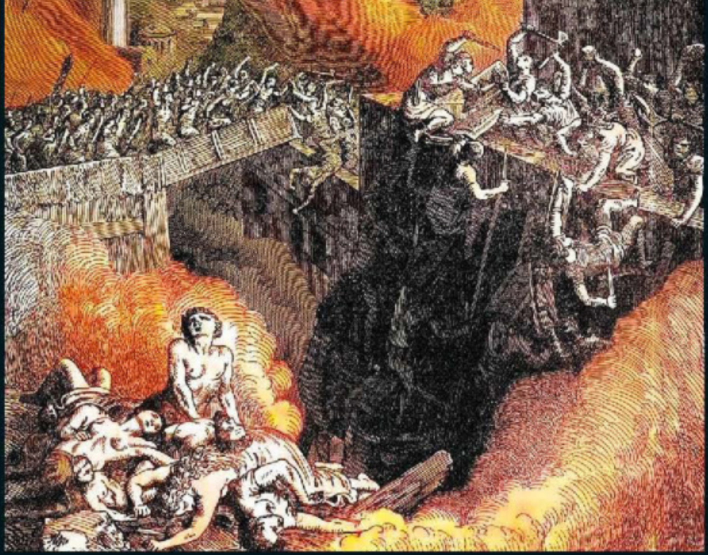
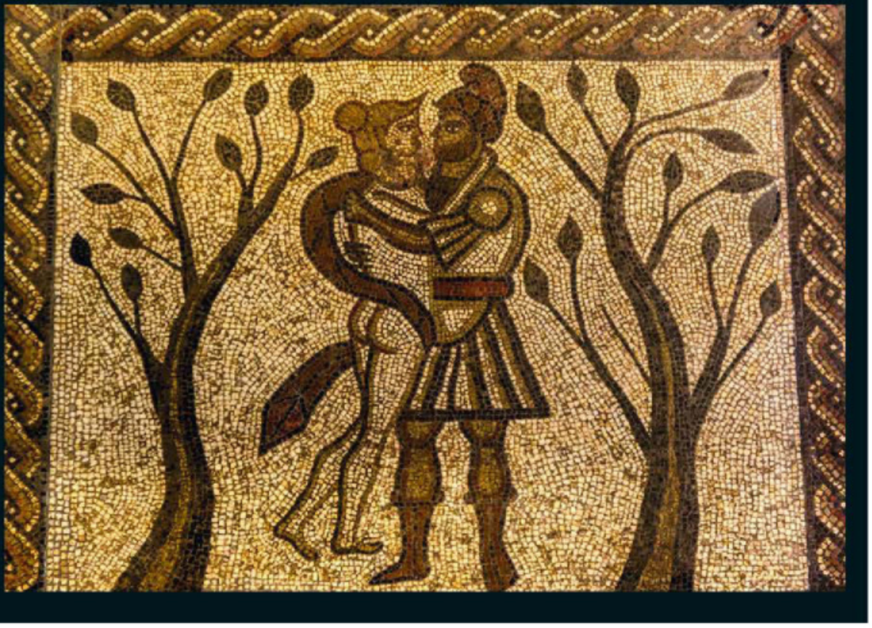


Storming the city Carthage is destroyed by Roman forces in 146 BC, as depicted in a coloured 19th-century engraving. That city's downfall became key in stories Rome told about itself



Femme fatale The mythological Phoenician princess Dido, who reputedly founded Carthage, shown with the Trojan hero Aeneas in a Roman mosaic. Virgil painted Dido as a temptress, reinforcing Roman views of Carthaginians as duplicitous

clashed with her brother in Tyre (now in Lebanon) and left to lead an expedition to the western Mediterranean where, according to the legend, she established her new city.

Melting pot

The Phoenician name for Carthage was Qart Hadasht – 'the New City'. From its very earliest days, it was a melting pot of cultures. Here, north Africans (called Numidians or Libyans in the Greek and Roman sources, today known as Amazigh), Greeks and Phoenicians from ancient centres of the eastern Mediterranean lived and intermarried, along with various Semitic-speaking peoples and others from western regions.

As the city evolved into a state, it created new citizens who, by the fifth century BC, had become Carthaginians. This colonial story reflects the origins of so many of the great cities of the western Mediterranean, whose origins were a mix of eastern Mediterranean and indigenous western peoples. Carthage was, like Rome, founded under a monarchical rule that evolved into a republican-styled oligarchy built on a mix of religious traditions and ethnicities.

Archaeological excavations have revealed more about these years. They tell us that it was not an easy start for the Carthaginians, the population growing slowly from the city's foundation on a hill called Byrsa. But within a few centuries they were producing steel in their forges, exporting agricultural produce and importing luxury goods from the east, west, north and south.

Material found in burials in the city reflects a dialogue between different influences from the eastern Mediterranean, central Italy and the far west. There are decorated ostrich eggs and gold jewellery with Egyptian-influenced imagery, and unguents and perfumes imported in delicate vessels from the east. Carthaginians traded across the Mediterranean, and were allied to many different cities and states – including the Romans, whose earliest known treaty was with Carthage, in the sixth century BC. The two cities shared cults, competed for markets and had related families; they were friends before they ever became enemies.

The Phoenician cities of the Levant – broadly, from Lebanon to Syria, Israel and Palestine today – were conquered by the Achaemenid Persian empire in the sixth and fifth centuries BC. That changed the relationship between Carthage and its mother city, Tyre, providing the catalyst for the African city to grow into its own power. This coincided with an increasingly linked Mediterranean world and a boom in wealth and knowledge across the region – with Carthage in the middle of it all.

Phoenician-speaking peoples from ancient cities such as Byblos, Tyre, Sidon and Beirut (all in what's now Lebanon) had spread out across the Mediterranean, bringing with them an alphabet that was adopted by the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans, and which

A carved stela from Carthage. Such artefacts were devoted to Phoenician deities that became identified with Greek gods

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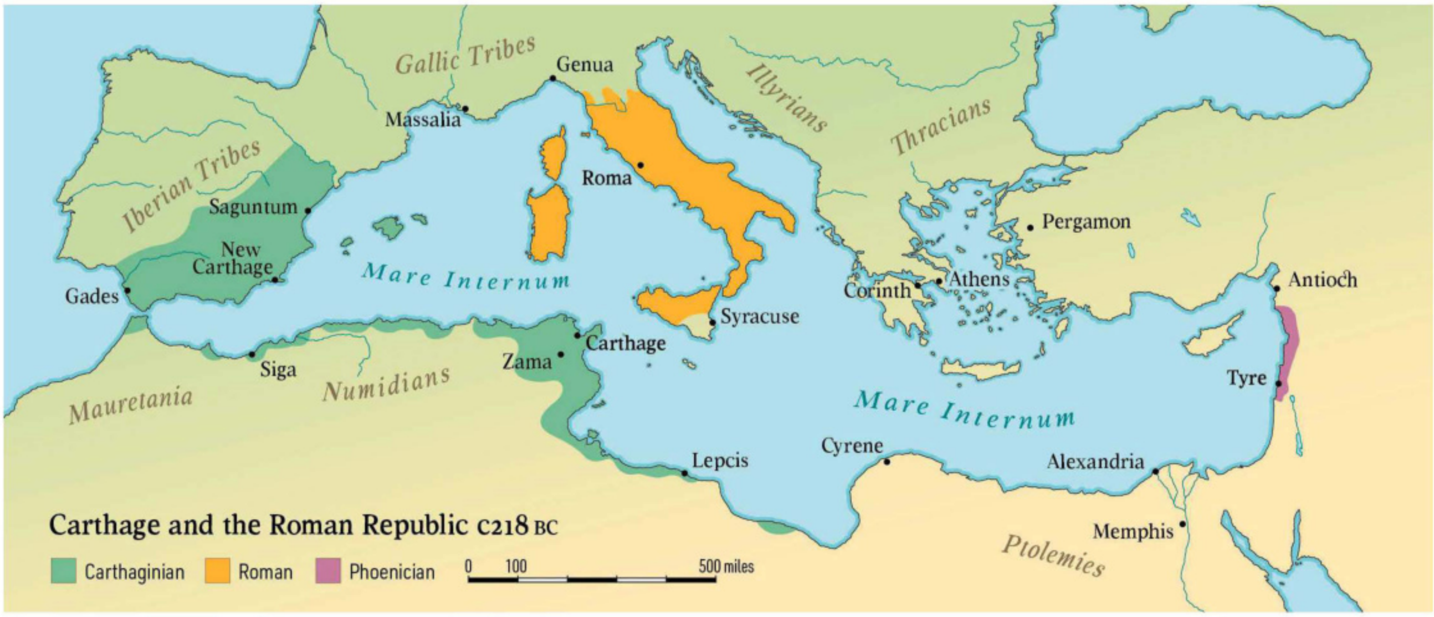


seeded the characters we still use today. From the eighth and seventh centuries BC, connected cities were established on Sicily, Sardinia, Malta, the Balearic Islands, the north coast of Africa and the southern coast of Spain and Portugal, all of which shared a Phoenician language and culture of origin.

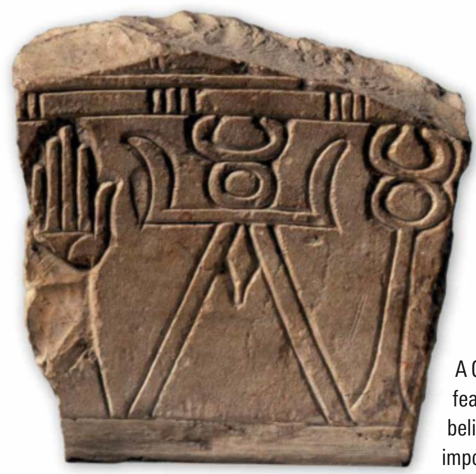
Paradigm of power

At the centre of this network was Carthage, which grew powerful and wealthy – but also became drawn into conflict with other city states in the region, especially on the island of Sicily, which by the mid-third century BC was partially under direct Carthaginian control. In c264 BC, the Romans launched an all-out war on Sicily that shifted the paradigm of power and, in their own records, created a new narrative about their might. The Greek historian Polybius (c200–c118 BC) sets up his account of the rise of Rome with the lines: “I shall take as my starting point the first time that the Romans crossed to Sicily.”

From the late third century BC, as the Romans fought wars with Carthage, they also started to write about them. Only fragments of lost epic poetry survive from this period, but these few words are some of the earliest surviving pieces of Latin prose and verse, including Naevius’s *Bellum Poenicum* (*The Punic War*). So the Carthaginians, and the wars they fought with Rome, were a foundational part of the creation of Latin literature. The events of these so-called Punic Wars (more on that name later) shaped the very nature of the written culture that went on to influence all of the literature of the later European languages that derive from Latin.

A Carthaginian history of the wars survived, too, and we know that pro-Carthaginian (or at least anti-Roman) histories existed in the second century BC, mentioned by Polybius. These are now long lost, with only a few fragments remaining in later sources. So, though Carthage is embedded in the history of Latin literature, only the Roman view survives.

The Roman imperial propaganda machine convincingly painted the Carthaginians as monsters to be destroyed



A Carthaginian limestone stela fragment featuring the anthropomorphic symbol believed to represent Tanit, their most important female deity

The First Punic War lasted over 20 years, exhausting both sides. As a result, it’s often compared to the First World War in its devastating, and unintended, impact. Polybius described the combatants as “like two equally matched boxers, both courageous, fighting it out for a prize”. At the war’s end in 241 BC – Rome having claimed Sicily, but only briefly invaded north Africa – both sides were almost bankrupt and had lost tens of thousands of soldiers and marines. The peace was only ever likely to be temporary, giving the two cities time to regroup. Because Carthage had lost, it had to pay war indemnity to Rome for 10 years – and the peace held for only a few years longer than the payments continued.

The Second Punic War between the two great cities began just 23 years after the end of the first. The Carthaginian general Hannibal, son of the famous commander Hamilcar Barca, led an army into Italy and challenged the power of Rome in its heartland. That he did this in an attempt to protect the Carthaginian lands of Spain and Africa from an imminent Roman attack in 218 BC is largely forgotten. History blames Hannibal for the war, even though our ancient sources acknowledge so much confusion around the actual causes of the conflict that, just 60 years later, Polybius referred to the details as “the common gossip of a barber shop”. This was contested history in action – and we know today, more than ever, that historical ‘truth’ is not always easy to come by.

When Hannibal crossed the Alps with war elephants, horses and an army, he created a legend for posterity – and sparked mayhem in Italy. Between 218 and 216 BC, he won over to his side forces formerly allied with Rome, and defeated Roman armies in battle after battle.

TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

What if Hannibal had taken Rome?
Read our piece on the potential ramifications of a Carthaginian victory at *historyextra.com/hannibal-rome*

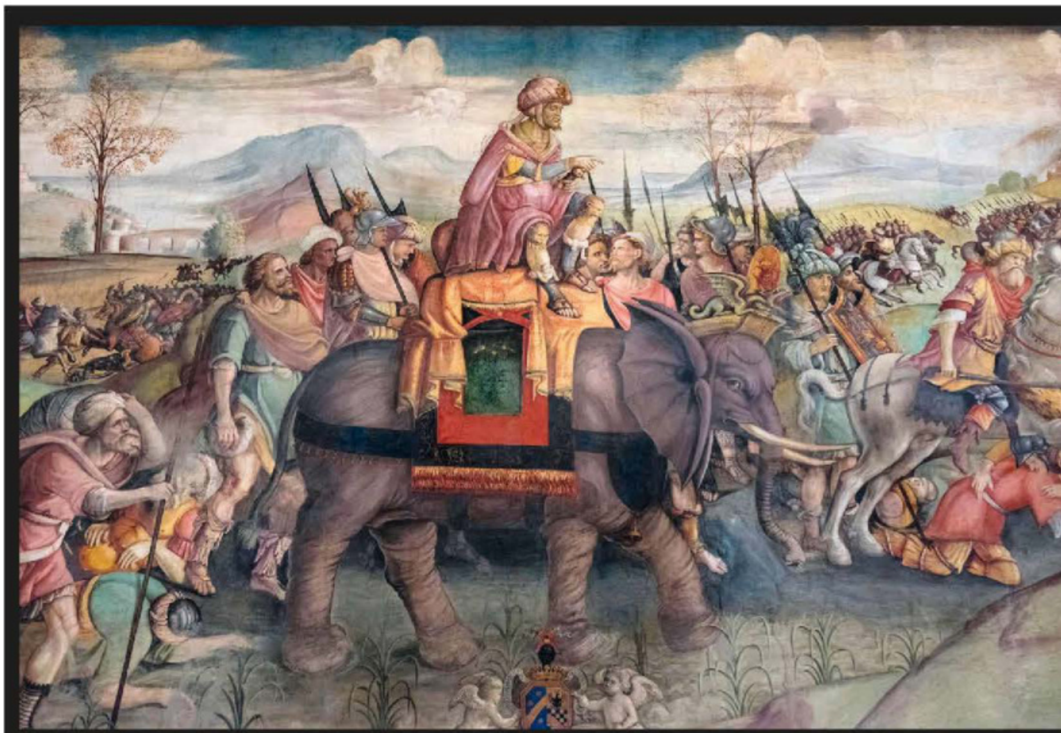
The Roman memory of Hannibal and the challenge he presented to their state in these years really epitomises how much the Romans created themselves in the face of their battles with Carthage. In the Roman mind, Hannibal was the perfect enemy: brave, intelligent and committed, but also cruel, treacherous and without integrity, according to Livy.

It is worth noting that Livy used a famous Latin phrase – "*perfidia plus quam Punica*" – which translates as "a treachery more than Punic". This epitomises the cultural stereotype that the Romans created for the Carthaginians, using the term 'Punic' to refer to the culture and language of Carthage. The word comes from the Latin *poenus*, thought to derive from the city's founders, the Phoenicians.

'Punic' was an ethnic stereotype current in Latin literature by the late third and early second century BC. By the time Livy wrote his history, between 27 and 9 BC, this concept had become very important to the memory of Carthage. That's because by then the Carthaginians no longer existed: that civilisation had been destroyed well over 100 years earlier.

In Livy's era, a new Roman colony was being built on the land taken from the Carthaginians. It was also a time when Virgil's epic poem of Roman identity, the *Aeneid*, linked Dido and Aeneas – who, according to the myth, became the ancestor of the Romans – in popular memory as star-crossed lovers.

The *Aeneid* refers to the Carthaginians as deceitful: it calls them "the double-tongued people of Tyre", tying them to their near-eastern roots and to duplicity. The poem served the interests of the first Roman emperor, Augustus, painting the Carthaginians as the offspring of a vengeful woman, who aimed to destroy Rome. The second century AD satirist Juvenal described Hannibal as "the one-eyed commander/ perched on his monstrous beast!" For Romans of the second century, the Carthaginians had been distilled down to these two caricatures – the wily Dido and the monstrous Hannibal.



Mammoth undertaking A 16th-century fresco shows the Carthaginian general Hannibal on an elephant during his 218 BC offensive into the Roman heartland, epitomising the bravery attributed to his people by Rome

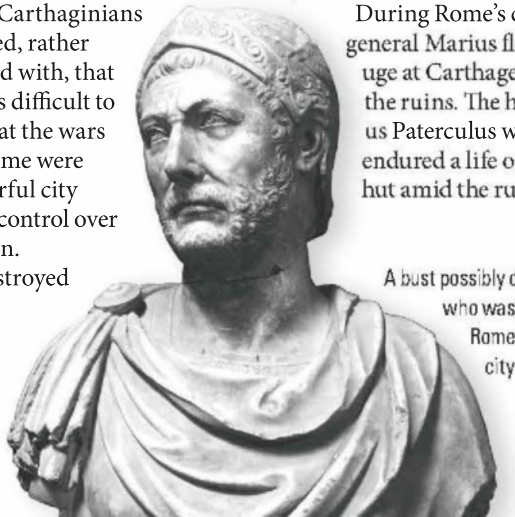
Roman propaganda

The Roman imperial propaganda machine so convincingly painted the Carthaginians as monsters to be destroyed, rather than rivals to be contended with, that the story of their culture is difficult to tell today. The reality is that the wars between Carthage and Rome were fought between two powerful city states, formerly allies, for control over the western Mediterranean.

After Carthage was destroyed in 146 BC, the survivors scattered across Africa or were enslaved across the Mediterranean, and Carthaginian culture was slowly absorbed into the landscape of a new imperial power. Gradually, the western Mediterranean came to speak Latin, not Phoenician or Greek as many of its people had previously, and Rome dominated the region for the next 600 years. But the memory of Carthage persisted. The *Aeneid*, Livy's history of Rome (*Ab Urbe Condita*) and the stories of epic war created a lasting, compelling memory of the Roman past.

In the first century AD, Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* tells us, "a statue of Hannibal may be seen in three places in [Rome] within the walls of which he alone of its national foes had hurled a spear". Loot from Carthage decorated Rome, and the visual memory of the north African city was embedded in the stories of the battles re-enacted in public games and celebrations.

During Rome's civil wars, the general Marius fled and took refuge at Carthage, resting among the ruins. The historian Velleius Paterculus wrote that "he endured a life of poverty in a hut amid the ruins of Carthage. There, Marius, as he gazed upon Carthage, and Carthage as she beheld Marius, might well have offered consolation the one to the other."



A bust possibly depicting Hannibal, who was commemorated in Rome long after his own city was destroyed

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN

The Romans framed their own rise to power and empire through their defeat of the Carthaginians, and these stories have preserved a narrative of the city for us today. At the end of antiquity, this memory continued to fascinate, and the idea of Carthage persevered in works ranging from those of Arabic geographers to the Renaissance translations of Latin epics. For centuries, Europeans framed their own wars in the shadow of Rome and Carthage: when Napoleon crossed the Alps in 1800 en route to the battle of Marengo in Piedmont, he echoed Hannibal's great journey (famously depicted in David's painting *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*).

Each year, new scientific techniques and discoveries expand our understanding, and reveal more of a different story of the people of Carthage. But an enduring fact is that without Carthage, the Roman empire as we know it would not have existed.

Eve MacDonald is senior lecturer in ancient history at Cardiff University. Her latest book, *Carthage: A New History of an Ancient Empire*, was published by Ebury in August

Melvyn Bragg and guests discussed the destruction of Carthage in an episode of BBC Radio 4's **In Our Time**. Listen on BBC Sounds: *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b00hdd5x*

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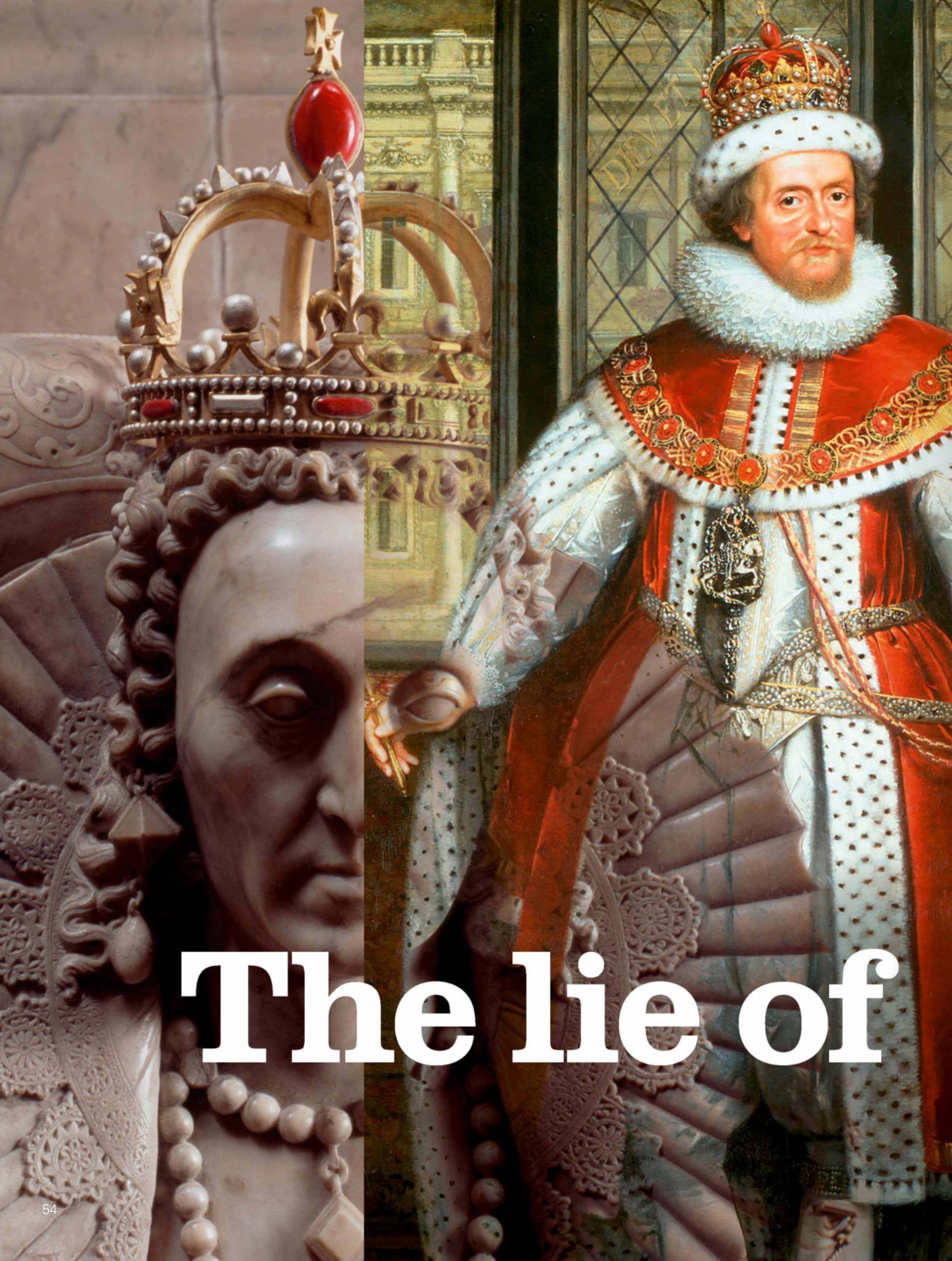
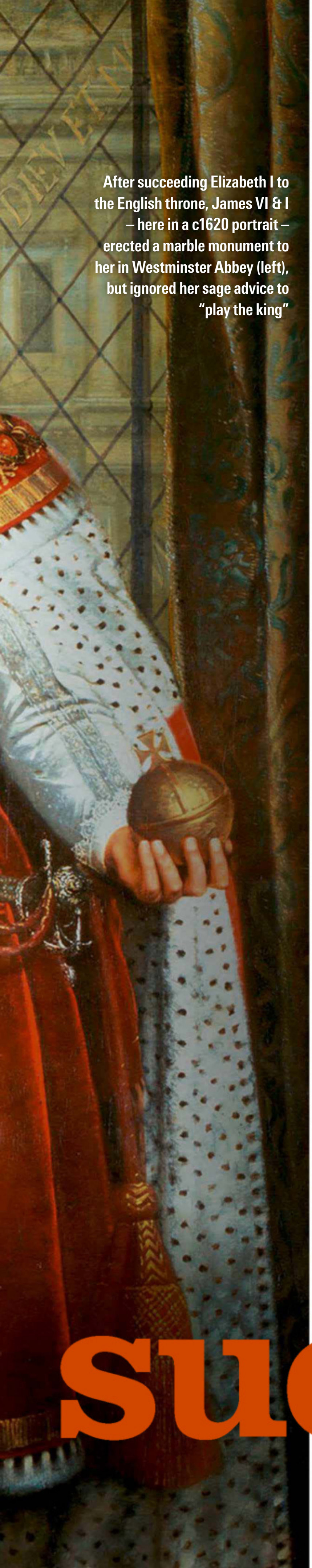


The lie of



After succeeding Elizabeth I to the English throne, James VI & I – here in a c1620 portrait – erected a marble monument to her in Westminster Abbey (left), but ignored her sage advice to "play the king"

ALAMY

succession

Did James I 'steal' Elizabeth I's crown? **Tracy Borman** considers evidence that the transition from Tudor to Stuart dynasties may not have been quite as seamless as we've been led to believe

Richmond Palace, 22 March 1603. Elizabeth I – the self-proclaimed Virgin Queen who had ruled England for 44 years, seeing off the Armada, healing religious divisions and creating a court so magnificent it was the envy of Europe – lay dying. Her anxious advisers clustered around her bedside, urging her to do the thing she had resisted throughout her long reign: name her successor.

Rousing herself from her stupor, the 69-year-old queen declared: "I will that a king succeed me, and what king, but my nearest kinsman, the king of Scots?" Wanting to make completely sure, her chief minister, Robert Cecil, asked whether that was her "absolute resolution" – to which she irritably retorted: "I pray you trouble me no more, I'll have none but him."

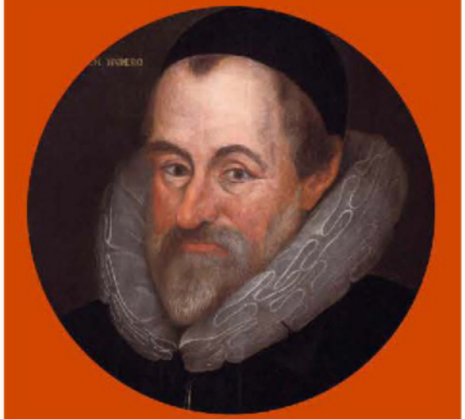
That "kinsman" was James VI of Scotland, son of Elizabeth's old rival Mary, Queen of Scots. Her closest surviving blood relative, he had emerged as the front runner in the race for the English crown. He had the support of Cecil and most of his fellow privy councillors, who had been working behind the scenes to smooth James's path to the throne. The queen, too, had shown him favour, sharing the pearls of her monarchical wisdom during their 20-year correspondence, as if grooming him as her successor. But she had always flinched from actually naming him as such. Now, almost with her last breath, she had. Elizabeth died two days later – and the Tudor dynasty gave way peacefully to the Stuarts.

This dramatic depiction of Elizabeth's last-gasp naming of the Scottish king as her heir is based solely on an account by the contemporary historian and antiquarian William Camden. He had begun writing his monumental work *Annales: The True and Royall History of the Famous Empresse Elizabeth* (first published in Latin in 1615) during Elizabeth's lifetime. Camden was close to some senior members of the queen's court, and had access to the voluminous state papers of her reign, so historians have relied on his manuscript as one of the most important and accurate sources for the period.

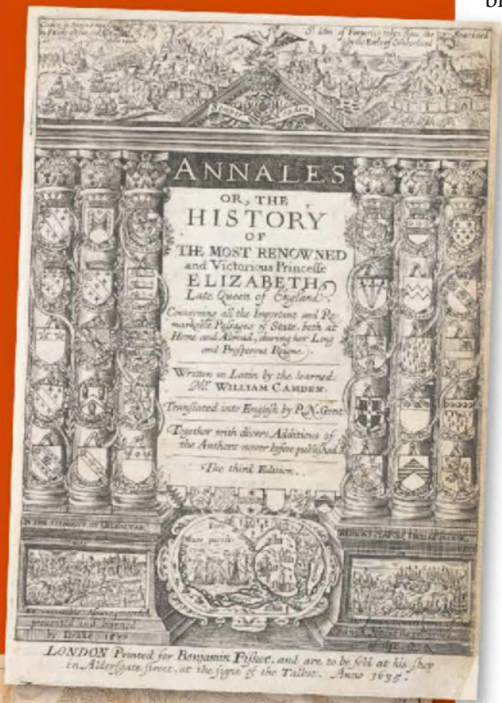
However, none of those present at Elizabeth's deathbed testified that she had spoken the words Camden quoted in his account, only that the dying queen had raised her hand to her head when James's name was mentioned – an ambiguous gesture at best.

Rewriting history

Now, groundbreaking new analysis of Camden's original manuscript by a team at the British Library has revealed that key passages were covered over and rewritten after Elizabeth's death to make them more favourable to her successor. No fewer than 200 pages have been pasted in, 65 of which replaced original text with a new version. The use of imaging technology has enabled researcher Helena Rutkowska to see the words underneath for



A portrait of William Camden, based on a work of 1609, the year after James ordered him to finish his history of Elizabeth's reign



ANNALES
OR, THE
HISTORY
OF
THE MOST RENOWNED
and Victorious Princeſſe
ELIZABETH,
Late Queen of England.
Concerning all the Important and Remarkable Paſſages of State, both at Home and Abroad, during her Long and Proſperous Reigne.

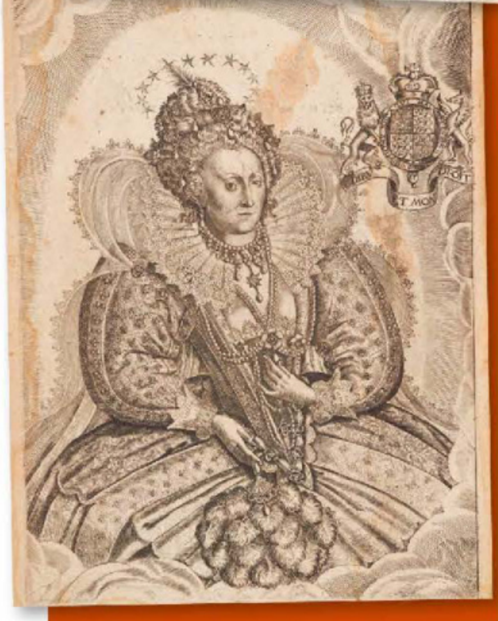
Written in Latin by the learned Mr WILLIAM CAMDEN.

Tranſlated into Engliſh by R.N. Gent.

Together with divers Additions of the Authors never before publiſhed.

The third Edition.

LONDON Printed for Benjamin Fiſher, and are to be ſold at his ſhop in Alderſgate ſtreet, at the ſigne of the Talbot. Anno 1635.



Camden's book (centre) was a paean to Elizabeth (above), but reworded to make James's succession seem more assured than it had been

the first time in 400 years. Among the findings are that Elizabeth's naming of James as her heir was a work of fiction, designed to make his accession appear more predetermined than it had been. In fact, she had been the only monarch in English history not to make provision for the succession.

If this had been more widely known at the time, it might have had profound repercussions for the Stuart dynasty. Rather than welcoming James as the king to whom 'Good Queen Bess' had given her blessing, the people of England might have refused to accept him. After all, England and Scotland had been bitter enemies for centuries, with fleeting periods of peace cut short by the clash of arms or threat of invasion. And James was by no means the only candidate with a strong claim to Elizabeth's throne.

Holding on by his fingertips

Camden had first been commissioned to write his history of Elizabeth's reign in 1596 by William Cecil (Robert's father), Lord Burghley – Elizabeth's most trusted advisor, whom she dubbed her 'Spirit'. It was not a task that the author had embraced with any alacrity, grumbling about the "piles and heaps of papers and writings of all sorts" that had been placed at his disposal. He made only a faltering start during Elizabeth's lifetime and, as soon as she died, he quietly set down his quill, hoping that the idea would be forgotten.

Fast forward to 1607 and James VI & I had been on the English throne for four years. The initially peaceful transition from Tudors to Stuarts had given way to turbulence and uncertainty, conspiracy and persecution, witchcraft and gunpowder. With the accession of England's first Stuart monarch, everything had been transformed – from court culture to royal ceremony, religious tolerance to parliamentary authority, morality to witch-hunting. Two countries that had been fierce rivals for centuries were now forged into an uncomfortably united kingdom. The fleeting popularity that James had enjoyed as the "bright star of the north" had been extinguished, and he was holding onto his new crown by his fingertips.

It was at this moment that James heard about Camden's stalled biography of his predecessor, and spied an opportunity. To have a published account of Elizabeth's reign – and, in particular, the succession – written by one of the most esteemed historians of the age would help silence any whispers of usurpation. If, that is, the author was prepared to write it to the king's satisfaction.

It was with good reason that Camden expressed reluctance when first approached by the king to restart his history of Elizabeth.

The fleeting popularity that James had enjoyed as the "bright star of the north" had been extinguished

Quite apart from the heavy burden of research it entailed, writing the history of a queen who, even in death, was eclipsing her unpopular successor was fraught with difficulty. Camden knew that James would not want an unbiased appraisal but one written in his favour. Only the previous year, the king had ordered an account of the gunpowder plot to be rewritten so that it was even more complimentary towards him.

Restarting the history of Elizabeth was the very definition of a poison chalice, and Camden tried everything to avoid drinking from it. But James gave him no choice. At the king's command, work on the book resumed in 1608. Camden was his subject to command, and the succession was his to rewrite.

Reviving the queen

By the time Camden again took up his quill, rewriting sections to James's benefit, the cult of 'Gloriana' was already in full swing. Elizabeth's former subjects were quick to forget that they had grown tired of "an old woman's government" and had longed to have a king ruling over them. One contemporary reflected that, a few short years after Elizabeth's death, "when we had experience of the Scottish government, then… in hate and detestation of them, the queen did seem to revive. Then was her memory much magnified."

It was not long before praising the last Tudor queen became a powerful weapon used to attack her Stuart successor. Donning their rose-tinted glasses, her former subjects harked back to a halcyon time when England had enjoyed decades of peace and prosperity, triumphed over the might of Spain, and was presided over by a glorious queen and her court. The anniversary of Elizabeth's accession day, 17 November, began to be celebrated each year with "joyful ringing of bells, running at tilt, and festival mirth… in testimony of their affectionate love towards her".

But this sentimental reverence masked the intense uncertainty that had been generated by the persistent refusal of 'Good Queen Bess' to name her heir. It's worth revisiting the

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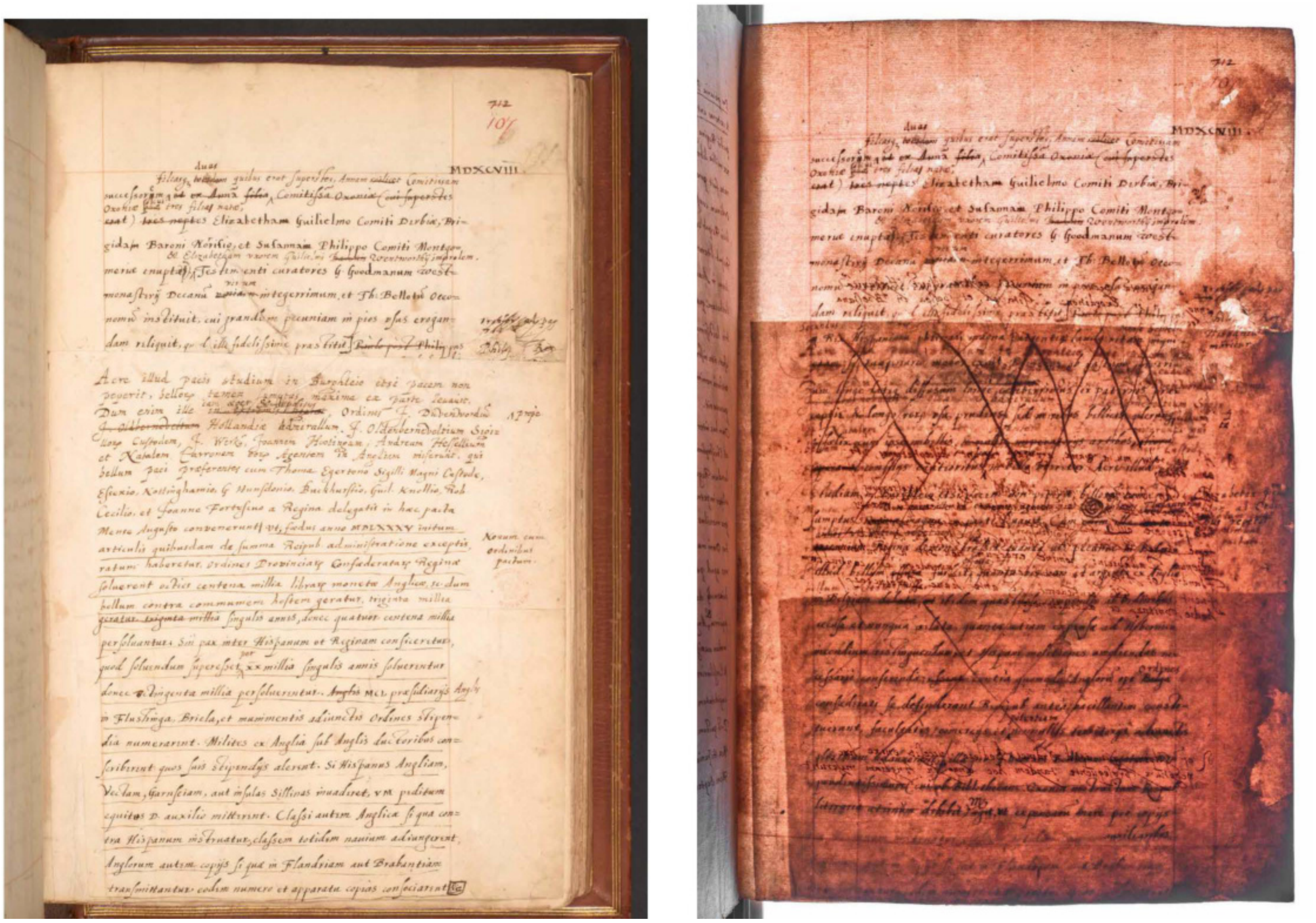


Hidden truth Imaging technology enabled researchers to read sections of Camden's manuscript pasted over with replacement text – in this case, exonerating James of involvement in a plot to assassinate Elizabeth

BRITISH LIBRARY-BRIDGEMAN

history of this reticence and the concerns it had fomented among court and populace.

On 10 February 1559 Elizabeth had told the first parliament of her reign that "in the end this shall be for me sufficient: that a marble stone shall declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin". She then declared that God would provide for the succession and would name an heir "peradventure more beneficial to the realm than such offspring as may come of me".

This was all very well but, without the wisdom of hindsight, Elizabeth's subjects had no idea that she would reign longer and more successfully than any of the other Tudor monarchs. Her three predecessors, Edward VI, Lady Jane Grey and Mary I, had reigned for six years, nine days and five years, respectively, and there was no reason to suppose Elizabeth would escape the ill health that dogged the Tudor dynasty. Indeed, nearly four years into her reign she almost died of smallpox. This catapulted the succession to the forefront of people's minds and, once there, it would not be forgotten. "Now all the talk is who is to be her successor," reported the Spanish ambassador, Bishop Álvaro de la Quadra, in 1562.

Elizabeth's determination not to name her heir was born of direct experience. Being heir presumptive during her sister Mary's brief, bloody reign had placed her in great jeopardy, including a spell in the Tower under threat of execution. "I stood in danger of my life, my sister was so incensed against me," she told a delegation from parliament in 1566 that had been sent to persuade her to settle the succession. Elizabeth feared that, as soon as she named her heir, the individual chosen would be the focus of plots and rebellions, just as she herself had been during Mary's reign. "Think you that I could love my winding-sheet?" she demanded to an ambassador, likening a named heir to a shroud.

Fierce rivalry

In remaining tight-lipped about the succession, Elizabeth gave rise to fierce rivalry between the blood claimants to her throne. Principal among them were Mary, Queen of Scots and her son James VI; his cousin Arbella Stuart; Lady Katherine Grey and her descendants; Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon; and the Infanta Isabella, daughter of Philip II of Spain (see box overleaf for more on potential successors). As Elizabeth's reign progressed, most of the rival claimants fell by the wayside, either through natural death, disinheritance or execution. In the race for Elizabeth's throne, it was less a case of 'who dares wins', more 'survival of the fittest'.

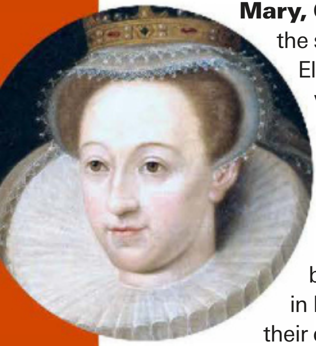
In 1600, the English government official and keeper of records Thomas Wilson opined: "This crown is not like to fall to the ground for want of heads that claim to wear it." Although he admitted that it was "straightly prohibited" to discuss the succession, he went on to give an account of at least 12 people with some kind of claim to the English throne who, in his words, "gape for" Elizabeth's death. Of these, eight were home-grown candidates and four were from overseas. James VI might have emerged as the odds-on favourite, but his accession was by no means certain.

As her long reign wore on, Elizabeth showed through her subtle, steady guiding of

CONTENDERS FOR THE CROWN

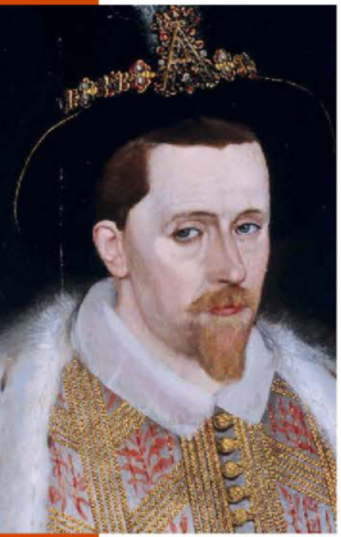
There was no shortage of people with designs on Elizabeth I's English throne. But who had the best chance of success?

The Scottish thorn



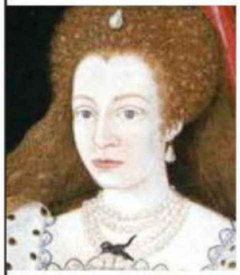
Mary, Queen of Scots had the strongest blood claim to Elizabeth's throne. She was the granddaughter of Henry VIII's elder sister, Margaret, who married James IV of Scotland. As a Catholic, she enjoyed considerable support among those in England who opposed their queen's Protestant faith. But Henry VIII's will had barred his Scottish relatives from inheriting the crown of England. Furthermore, a law passed in 1350, during the reign of Edward III, decreed that "aliens" (those not born on English soil) could not inherit any land there. Nevertheless, Mary campaigned tirelessly to be named heir, and was executed for trying to take the English throne by force.
Contender rating: **6 out of 10**

The front runner



James VI of Scotland, son of Mary, Queen of Scots, succeeded to his mother's throne when she was ousted from it in 1567. He also inherited her claim to Elizabeth's throne, though Mary's execution in 1587 threw that into jeopardy, because those related to a convicted traitor were tainted by association. In his favour was the fact that by the time of Elizabeth's death he had a proven track record of ruling a kingdom and, even better, was male. He also enjoyed the strongest support within the English government, and the tacit support of Elizabeth herself – though Henry VIII's and Edward III's statutes meant that James's accession in 1603 was technically illegal.
Contender rating:
7 out of 10

The arrogant orphan



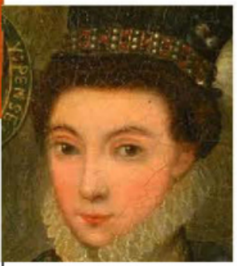
Like James, **Arbella Stuart** was the great-granddaughter of Henry VIII's elder sister, Margaret, but had the advantage of being born on English soil. Team Arbella was also bolstered by the efforts of her two indomitable grandmothers, Lady Margaret Douglas (Henry VIII's niece) and Bess of Hardwick, who promoted the claim of "poor orphan Arbella".

Arbella, though, was her own worst enemy. Haughty and arrogant, she alienated Queen Elizabeth, and her unstable temperament made her ill-suited for the throne. During James's reign, she secretly married another blood claimant, William Seymour, grandson of Lady Katherine Grey (see below), and spent the rest of her life a prisoner in the Tower.
Contender rating: **5 out of 10**

The marrying type

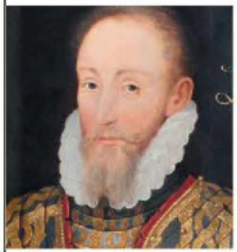
Henry VIII had decreed that, in the event that his three children died without issue, the crown would pass to the descendants of his younger sister Mary. This gave **Katherine Grey** (Mary's granddaughter) and her descendants the strongest legal basis for their claim, strengthened by the fact that Edward VI had made the Greys his primary heirs. Katherine sought to boost her chances further by secretly marrying Edward Seymour, the nephew of Henry VIII's third wife, Jane Seymour. But this backfired: Elizabeth condemned Katherine to life behind bars, and had her two sons declared illegitimate. However, they and their descendants continued to be seen as strong contenders for Elizabeth's throne for years afterwards.
Contender rating: **6 out of 10**

The "nearest in blood"



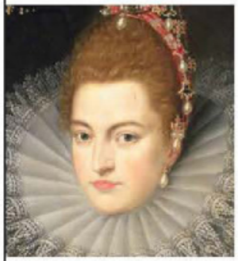
Lady Margaret Stanley was the daughter of Eleanor Brandon, younger daughter of Henry VIII's sister Mary. Margaret alleged that her cousins were debarred from the succession because of Lady Jane Grey's treason, leaving her next in line by Henry VIII's will and "as the nearest in blood… legitimately of English birth". Also in her favour was the fact that she had two living sons, Ferdinando and William. She was, though, Catholic.
Contender rating: **4 out of 10**

The uninterested Yorkist



Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon was of the old Yorkist line. His great-great-grandmother was Lady Margaret Pole, niece of King Edward IV. His grandfather had for a time been a close personal friend of Henry VIII. In stark contrast to all the other contenders, though, Hastings showed no interest in the crown, and spent his life in loyal service to Elizabeth. Still, she didn't trust him, and it was only after years in the political wilderness that she finally appointed him to office.
Contender rating: **5 out of 10**

The Spanish princess



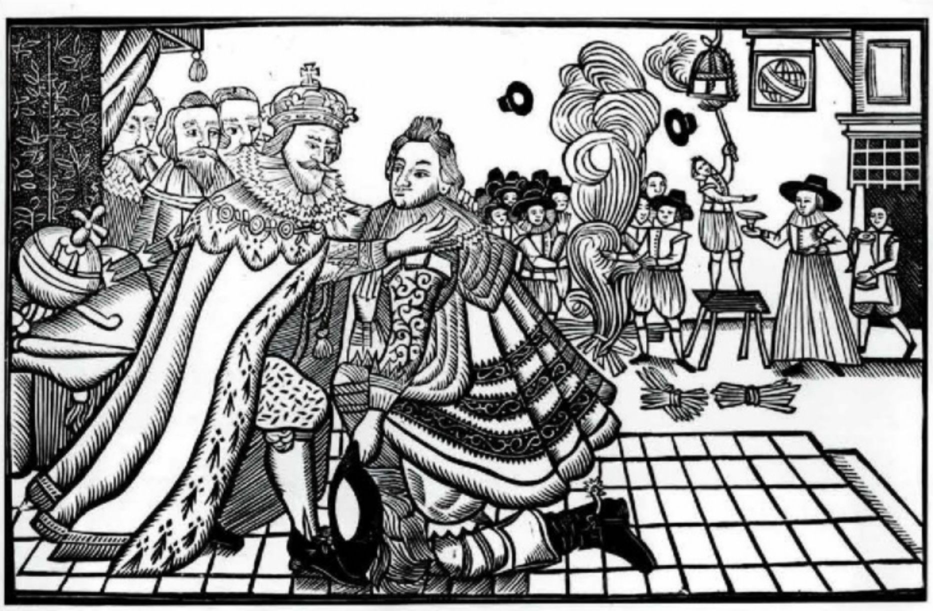
When his own attempts to seize Elizabeth's throne by force failed, Philip II of Spain promoted those of his daughter, the **Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia**. She was said to be "of the ancient blood royal of England" through her mother, Elisabeth of Valois. As such, she was a legitimate descendant of John of Gaunt, the fourth son of Edward III, whereas the Tudors were descended from his illegitimate line. But the people of England were notoriously xenophobic, viewing even James of Scotland as an "alien", and unlikely to ever accept a Spanish queen.
Contender rating: **3 out of 10**

GETTY IMAGES/ALAM/DETAIL FROM THE GREAT PICTURE, COURTESY OF ABBOT HALL, KENDAL (LAKELAND ARTS)

From Tudors to Stuarts Hear Tracy Borman discuss the jostling for Elizabeth I's crown on an episode of our podcast soon: *historyextra.com/podcast*

the king of Scots that he was, if not her ideal candidate, then at least the best of a bad lot. In the years leading up to her death, she did as much as she could to secure the succession without placing herself in danger by naming an heir. For all the anxiety, intrigue and rivalry that this engendered, the wisdom of her policy was proved by the fact that, to her last breath, her personal power in England had not been challenged by any "rising sun".

But the ultimate success of Elizabeth's plan depended on James following the advice she had drip-fed him over the years. And that is where it fell apart. It soon became clear that the king had paid only lip service to Elizabeth's guidance, and proceeded to flout it altogether when he took her throne. He refused to "play the king", as she had urged, by investing in the magnificence of his court and public appearances, and instead spent most of his time in private with just a handful of favourites.



Chip off the old block Prince Charles is welcomed by his father, James VI & I, in a 1623 woodcut. The second Stuart monarch of England took seriously the divine right of kings, and alienated his people and parliament

Parliamentary revolt

More ominously, James had no intention of sustaining the delicate relationship between crown and parliament that had been the cornerstone of Elizabeth's success. Instead, he stood firmly by the Stuart belief in the divine right of kings, which in his view gave him the right to ride roughshod over the wishes of his people and his parliaments.

This soon sparked resistance from his new English subjects. After a series of bad-tempered exchanges, parliament refused to agree to James's plan for a formal union between his two kingdoms. Undeterred, he announced that a shared currency would be issued – a 20-shilling piece known as the 'unite' – and commissioned a new flag, the 'Union Jack' (for Jacobus, or James). Thereafter, rather than working in partnership with his government, he abandoned it altogether, spending his days hunting and cavorting with his favourites. One contemporary noted that this was "the cause of indescribable ill-humour among the king's subjects, who in their needs and troubles find themselves cut off from their natural sovereign".

> **In preparing his son and heir, Charles, for the throne, James passed on none of the lessons that Elizabeth had tried to teach him**

Meanwhile, growing popular resentment against the king erupted in numerous conspiracies to remove him from the throne. In June 1603, just three months after his accession, the 'Bye' plot came to light, involving a group of Catholics who planned to kidnap the king and secure concessions for the practice of their religion. More serious was the 'Main' plot to oust James and replace him with his cousin Arbella Stuart.

The most dangerous conspiracy of all came in 1605, when a group of Catholics led by Robert Catesby schemed to blow up the king and his parliament. It was only thanks to an anonymous tip-off that Westminster was searched by the royal officials, and Guy Fawkes was discovered with a huge cache of gunpowder beneath the Houses of Parliament just hours before he was due to light the fuse.

The gold 'Unite' coin minted by James VI & I was designed to reflect his (unpopular) desire for a formal union of his two kingdoms

THE ROYAL MINT/GETTY IMAGES

Lessons not learned

All of this might have made James pause to consider that perhaps he ought to follow his predecessor's advice after all. Instead, he doggedly continued his preferred style of monarchy, no matter the cost. Worse still, in preparing his son and heir, Charles, for the throne, James passed on none of the lessons that Elizabeth had tried to teach him. Charles would be a king in the mould of his Stuart father, not his Tudor predecessor. He took his divine right to even greater extremes than his father, and dissolved parliament whenever it refused to carry out his will.

As Charles's turbulent reign wore on, the spectre of uncertainty over the Stuarts' right to the Tudor throne – uncertainly that, we now know was all too valid – was thrown into sharp relief. By 1642, he had pushed the supremacy of the royal will too far on both sides of the border. The kingdom was plunged into bitterly fought civil wars that culminated in Charles's execution and the destruction of the monarchy. In the space of half a century, the crown that had glittered so brightly on Elizabeth's head had been consigned to the flames. H

Tracy Borman's new book, *The Stolen Crown: Treachery, Deceit and the Death of the Tudor Dynasty*, is published by Hodder & Stoughton

In the 12th century, a sect of killers spread fear across the Middle East, executing a series of high-profile political murders. **Steve Tibble** introduces the original Assassins

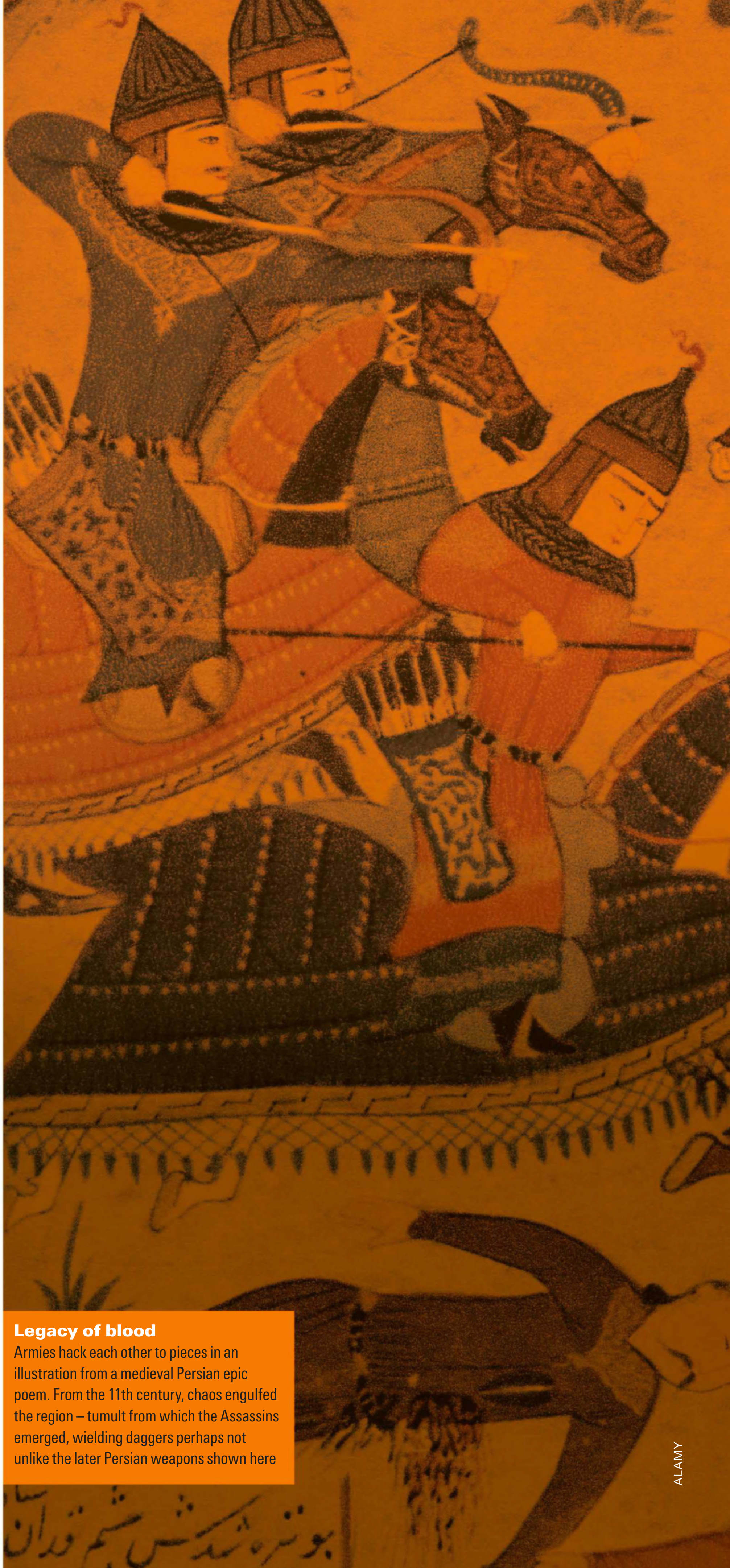
There were 13 men: unlucky for someone. They were dressed to kill – but so was everyone else. In what was essentially an army camp, crammed with armed men, the assailants blended right in. Moving casually but intently through the bustling camp outside Aleppo in Syria, past stalls and shopkeepers, beggars and soldiers, they headed towards their target.

Suddenly their progress was checked by a shout from behind: "What are you doing here?" Cover blown, their response was shocking: an explosion of violence, weapons flashing, blood splashing. The team of Assassins erupted into the tent where their victim sat unawares, surrounded by generals, lackeys and bodyguards. The attackers' daggers and swords struck once more.

The target that day in January 1175 was a Kurdish general, Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub – better known to us as Saladin. He had displaced the Fatimid dynasty to rule as sultan of Egypt, and was now muscling in on Syria. That vicious attack on his life failed – for now. But who were these men? And why had they launched such a murderous and seemingly suicidal assault?

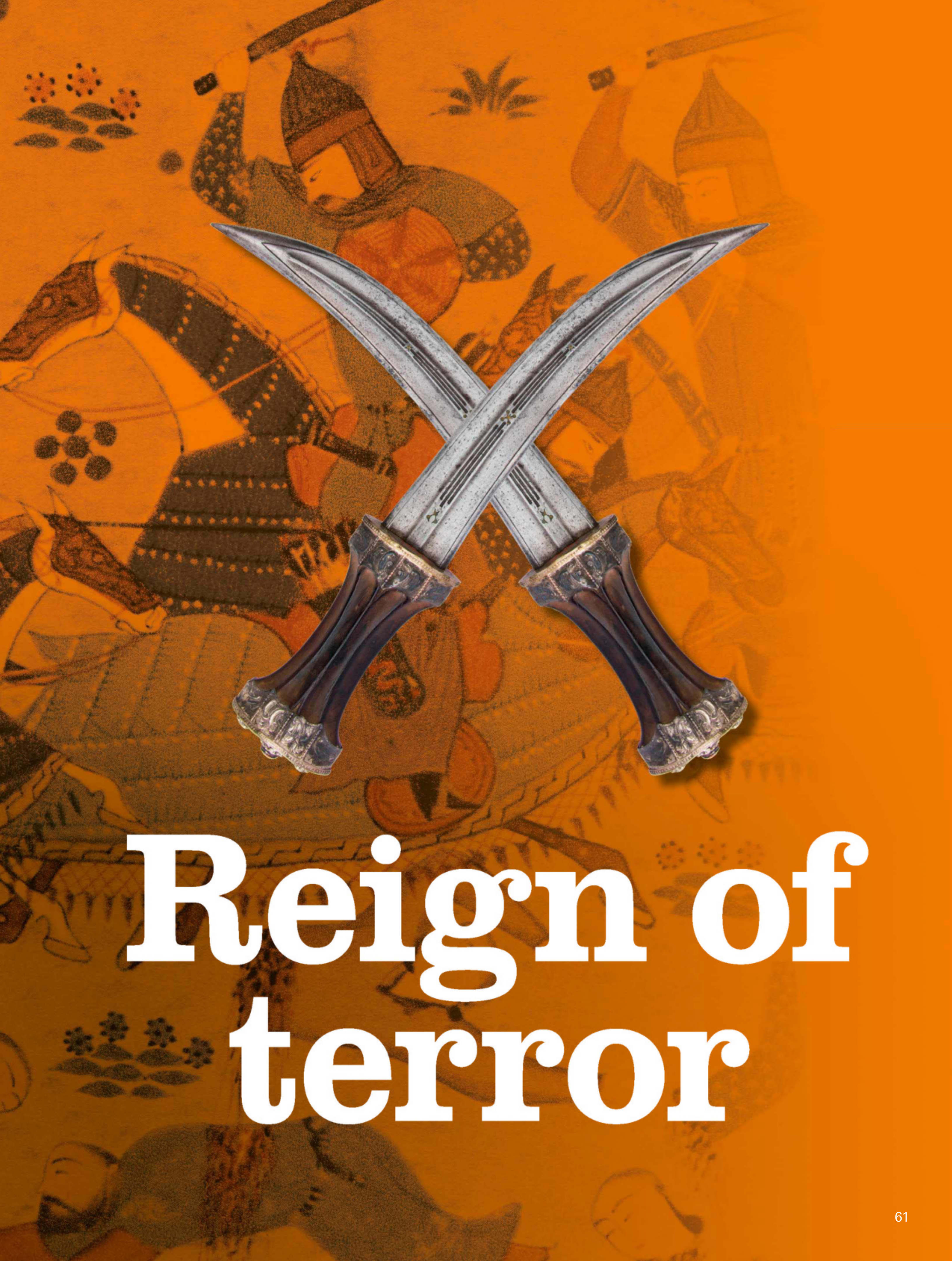
Power through murder

Those brutal killers were Assassins. The upper case seems pedantic, but it is important. In the true medieval sense, that term was used for members of the Nizari Ismailis, a Shia Muslim sect who sought to defend themselves and to project power through

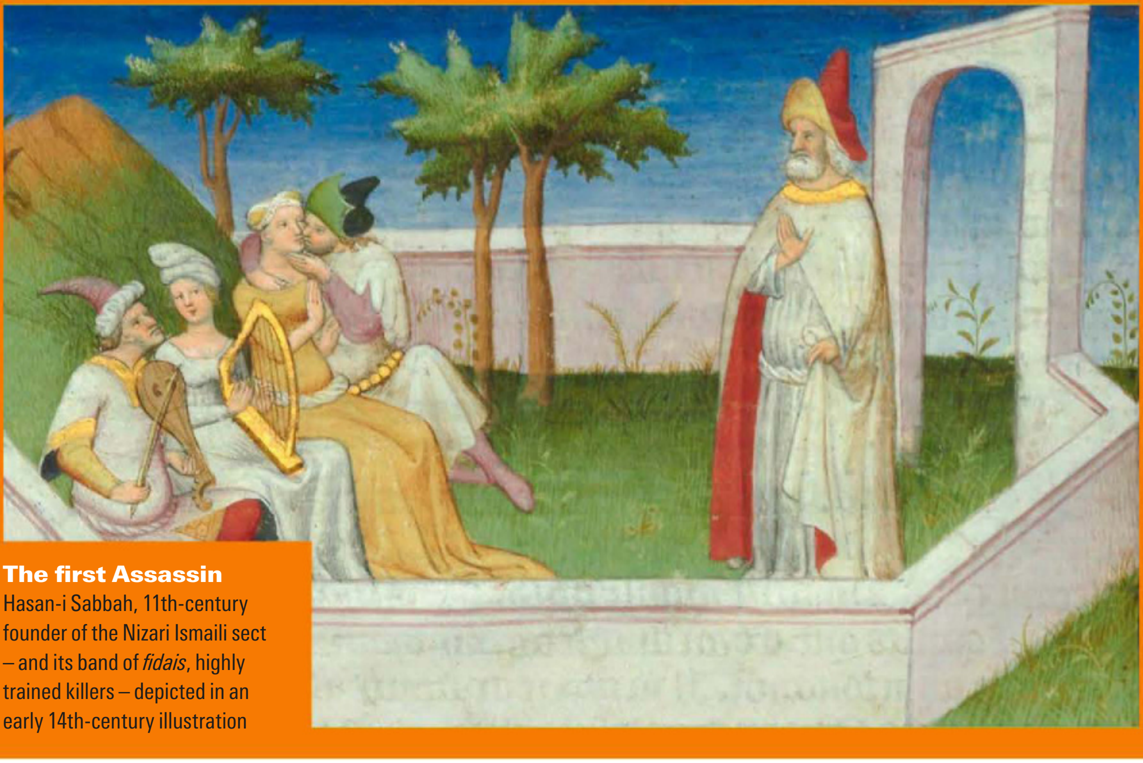


Legacy of blood
Armies hack each other to pieces in an illustration from a medieval Persian epic poem. From the 11th century, chaos engulfed the region – tumult from which the Assassins emerged, wielding daggers perhaps not unlike the later Persian weapons shown here

ALAMY



Reign of terror



The first Assassin
Hasan-i Sabbah, 11th-century founder of the Nizari Ismaili sect – and its band of *fidais*, highly trained killers – depicted in an early 14th-century illustration

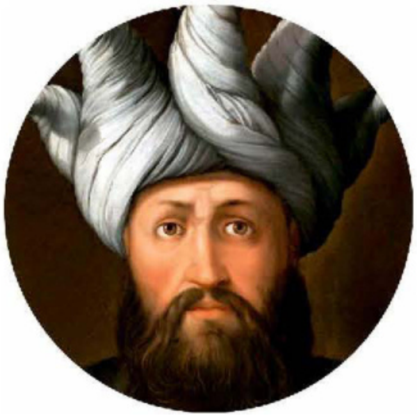
political murder. The word 'Assassin' (or *hashishin*) was used as a pejorative by those on the receiving end of their remorseless hit squads in the 12th and 13th centuries. And the name stuck, becoming synonymous for premeditated murderers or contract killers – even though most of the broader Nizari Ismaili community were in fact peaceful peasants, scholars and merchants.

The origins of this sect lay in the chaos of the Middle East in the late 11th century. Turkic tribes from the Eurasian steppes had stormed into the region and seized power from local Arab rulers, before starting to jockey among themselves for control of these new lands. Then, between 1092 and 1094, most of the major political leaders in the region died, including the vizier and caliph-imam of Fatimid Egypt, and the Seljuq sultan Malik-Shah, who ruled a vast empire stretching from Anatolia through the Middle East to central Asia. The resulting power vacuum was quickly filled with mayhem.

The Nizari Ismailis were widely despised by their powerful Sunni Muslim neighbours as heretics and traitors, so launched an audacious uprising against the Sunni Seljuq Turks in Persia – and, importantly for our story, sent out missionaries to set up bases in the mountains of Syria. This was occurring in the last decade of the 11th century, around the same time as the crusaders were sweeping into the area, carving out kingdoms of their own from which to defend the Holy Land.

By the start of the 12th century, the entire region had become disastrously fragmented. For the Nizari Ismailis – and for the recently arrived crusaders – Syria now seemed a land of opportunity. Members of this small breakaway sect were small in number and without obvious economic assets, but they had a terrifyingly effective secret weapon: the savage skills and unquestioning loyalty of a cadre of elite killers – the *fidais*.

There were lurid descriptions of the Assassins as drugged-up fanatics eager to die for a twisted cause



A 1560 portrait of Saladin. The Ayyubid sultan, who portrayed himself as a champion of Sunni orthodoxy, took aim at the Nizari Ismailis – making himself a target

Promise of death

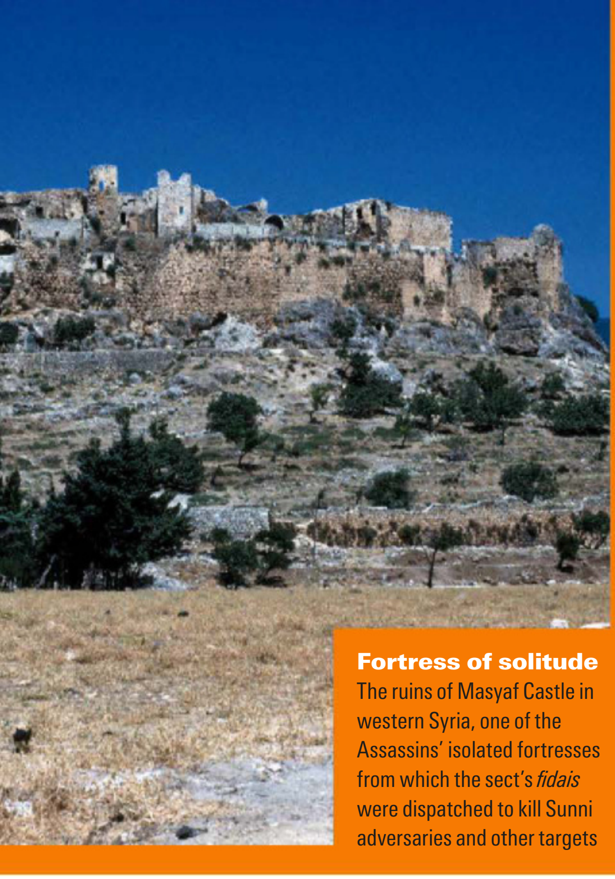
During the crusades, most major players employed a similar strategy: channel enormous amounts of money and energy into acquiring big armies, the basic building blocks upon which almost all power structures were built. But assembling these voraciously expensive and disruptive armies was a big enough challenge for wealthy nations – how could minor players survive? The short answer is that, in most cases, they did not. Before long, almost all of them were swept away.

The Nizari Ismailis chose a revolutionary alternative: rather than rely on the generality of death embodied by large (and expensive) armies, they chose the specificity of death. Individuals are afraid of violent endings, so any power that could spark and exploit that primal fear had no need of costly, clumsy armies. For the Nizari Ismailis – now, for our purposes, synonymous with the Assassins – violent, targeted death became their power, and their promise.

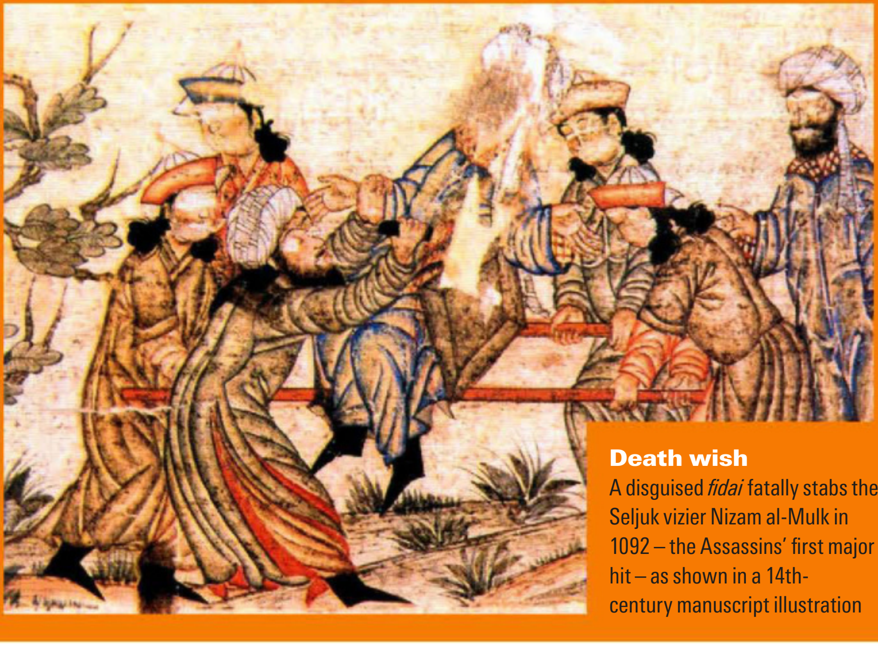
Their overall goal was to secure the survival and growth of the sect in a hostile environment, but specific tactical objectives varied. Murders were perpetrated for political reasons, to intimidate, for revenge, for money – for example, to pay for the construction of castles – out of personal animosity or, frequently, a combination of these reasons.

BRIDGEMAN

Crusader criminals? Steve Tibble reveals how the crusades unleashed a crimewave in an online article*: historyextra.com/crusader-criminals*



Fortress of solitude
The ruins of Masyaf Castle in western Syria, one of the Assassins' isolated fortresses from which the sect's *fidais* were dispatched to kill Sunni adversaries and other targets



Death wish
A disguised *fidai* fatally stabs the Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk in 1092 – the Assassins' first major hit – as shown in a 14th-century manuscript illustration

In their remote bases in Syria, the Assassins perfected and professionalised their squads of *fidais*. Only the most committed and able, mentally as well as physically, were chosen to receive the rigorous training needed to fulfil their highly dangerous missions, often with slim chances of survival. Most of their attacks were on high-profile individuals, and took place in very public spaces. Every member of a *fidai* team had to be courageous and committed to the cause.

They were described by their enemies as fanatical and brainwashed, but by admirers as dedicated and skilful. Regardless, the *fidais* were extraordinarily focused and effective – the ninjas of the 12th century Middle East.

Then, as now, there were many lurid descriptions of the Assassins as drugged-up, deluded fanatics eager to die for a twisted cause. But this was all part of the illusion – an essential element in the promise of 'unstoppable death' at the heart of the brand. The fear sown by the *fidais* – along with their own fearlessness and relentlessness, which made them such terrifying and efficient killers – was at the core of the Assassins' power. As one of their leaders retorted to an attempt at intimidation by an enemy, a general commanding vast armies: "Do you threaten a duck with the river?" If death was a river, in other words, the *fidais* were all too happy to swim in it.

Most of the associated rumours were untrue. It is unlikely, for instance, that *fidais* were given drugs such as hashish (cannabis resin) to numb their senses and inspire fanaticism before they carried out a hit. Being under the influence of narcotics would have been counterproductive: a skilled Assassin needed to have his wits about him.

Old Man of the Mountain

The Assassins' political murders started with a huge success in 1092, when a *fidai* named Bu Tahir Arrani stabbed the Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk as he was being carried in a litter towards Baghdad. Other Sunni leaders were then attacked and killed, including Janah al-Dawla, the Turkic governor of Homs, in 1103. Even Mawdud, the ruler of Mosul and the general entrusted with coordinating the campaign against the crusaders, was killed in Damascus in 1113, despite being surrounded by the best bodyguards that money could buy.

Mawdud's successor, Aqsunqur al-Bursuqi, fared no better, assassinated while at his prayers in the Great Mosque of Mosul in 1126. Members of the *fidai* squad were, as usual, cut down by the numerous bodyguards stationed around the target, with only one, "a youth from Azaz", surviving. (This was highly embarrassing for his mother, who was deeply proud of the celebrity status her brave son enjoyed in the sect and was already in mourning for him when he returned alive.)

By the mid-12th century, the Assassins had become feared across the region. This reputation was further confirmed under the rule of Rashid ad-Din Sinan, known as Sinan, who became ruler of the de facto Nizari Ismaili state in Syria and Persia in 1162. He strengthened the Assassins' network of mountain fortresses and perfected their deadly craft. Under him, the *fidais* became an even more professional and fearsome weapon – more formalised, better trained and increasingly highly motivated.

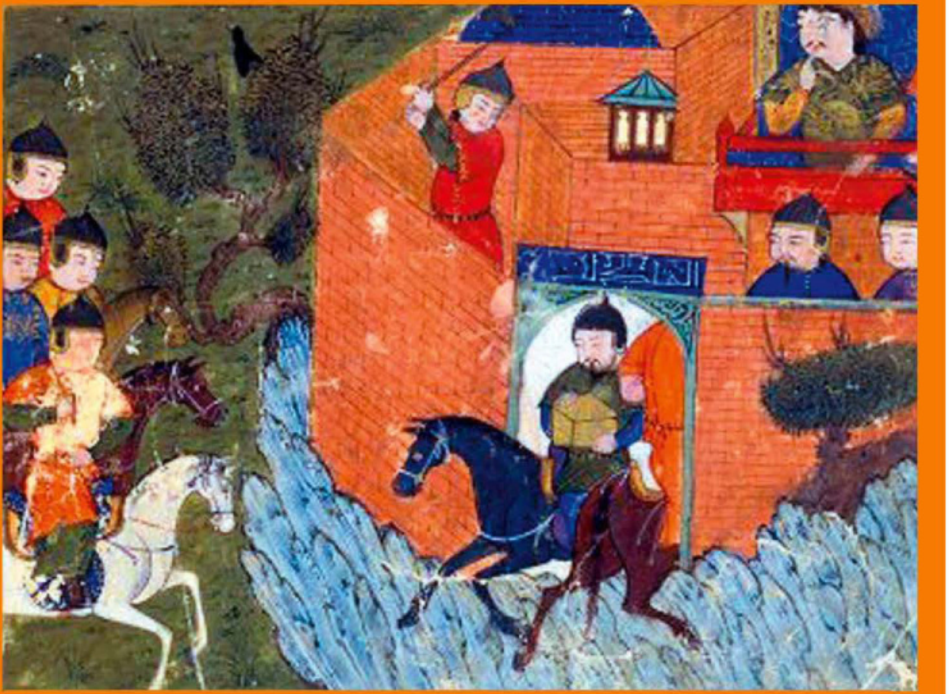
Sinan was an extraordinary figure: highly intelligent, a great leader and capable of acting with profound strategic insight. He was also a man of a deeply esoteric, mystical and, some would say, even 'magical' disposition. As one Sunni commentator later wrote, "the Ismaili sect followed him as they had followed no one else, and he was able to achieve what no other had achieved".

The main Nizari source about his life, an early 14th-century biography, was written by the scholar Abu Firas, who went to some lengths to emphasise the leader's orthodox Islamic credentials but also listed Sinan's supposed occult achievements. There were stories of telepathy and clairvoyance. Sinan was never seen eating, and he did not say much, but deliberately adopted strange poses. There were rumours among his own people that he did not cast a reflection in water.

He became known as the 'Old Man of the Mountain' – a title that, though originally a personal honorific, was later used to signify the Assassins' leader in Syria, a little like 'Caesar' or 'Sultan'. This helped create a sense of fear that transcended death: regardless of who was in charge at any moment, there was always an 'Old Man of the Mountain'.

The 'death cult' image that Sinan so fastidiously cultivated was a huge success. The Assassins' enemies fomented 'legendary' tales in attempts to denigrate and isolate their ruthless foe, but the killers benefited from the additional fear these stories fuelled. As one Nizari poet put it, a single *fidai* could strike fear into the heart of the most powerful king.

ALAMY/BNF



Killers killed A medieval miniature illustration shows Mongol warriors capturing Alamut Castle, the Nizari Ismaili sect's headquarters in northern Persia (now Iran), in 1256 – auguring the end of the Assassins

And there was one particular ‘king’ that the Assassins had in their crosshairs.

Saladin, a usurper desperate to shore up his image as a legitimate ruler, found it useful to pose as the champion of Sunni orthodoxy – and as Shia ‘heretics’, the Nizari Ismailis were handy scapegoats. They, along with the crusaders, were the unifying bogeymen of his self-justification. The Assassins correctly identified that his new Ayyubid empire posed an existential threat to the Nizari Ismaili sect – and decided that he should be eliminated.

Hard target

As outlined at the start of this story, and reported by the chronicler Ibn al-Athir the following century, the first *fidai* team struck while Saladin was besieging Aleppo in 1175, when 13 men armed with knives were dispatched to kill him. The attack was timed to coincide with the communal meal, when servants and guests would be distracted. But, as we've seen, on that occasion the *fidais* were thwarted by a piece of bad luck. An emir in Saladin's camp recognised them as Nizari Ismailis, and asked: “What has brought you here? On what business have you come?”

Knives were drawn: the Assassins stabbed the emir “with some deadly blows, and one of their number charged towards Saladin to slay him but was killed before he could reach him”, said Ibn al-Athir. The *fidai* who got closest had his head hacked off by an emir, and Saladin's chancellor, Imad al-Din, wrote that “the others were not killed until they had killed a number of people”. The Assassins failed on this occasion – but they did not die quietly.

The next year, Saladin was besieging the castle of Azaz, belonging to one of his Sunni rivals, north-west of Aleppo. Here the Assassins launched another, even more deadly attempt on his life, with a smaller but more focused team ordered to strike Saladin's neck and head. Al-Athir wrote that “while Saladin was in a tent belonging to one of his emirs, [an Assassin] leapt on him, struck him on the head with a dagger and wounded him”.

The blade met iron rather than flesh and bone. Spooked by the earlier attempt on his life, Saladin was almost totally covered in layers of concealed armour.

“Had it not been for the mailed helmet under his cap,” wrote Ibn al-Athir, “he would have been killed. Saladin grasped the [Assassin's] hand in his, although he was unable totally to prevent him striking a blow.”

The sultan's men rushed to his aid, and killed that assailant. Another member of the hit squad killed one of Saladin's commanders; a third fought on until he was killed by Saladin's brother. The last surviving *fidai* escaped from the tent but was torn apart by the crowd outside. A bloodied Saladin was hustled away “in a state of shock, hardly crediting his escape… The sultan rode to his tent, terrified by this event, with his blood flowing down his cheek and the collar of his chain mail wet.”

The last surviving Assassin escaped from Saladin's tent but was torn apart by the crowd that had gathered outside

Saladin quickly sent a reassuring message back to Egypt to dispel any sign of weakness and to discourage possible uprisings. “There was only a scratch with some few drops of blood,” he wrote. But he knew that he could no longer ignore the Assassins.

In July 1176, Saladin moved his armies into the heart of Nizari Ismaili territory and “ravaged their land, destroying and burning”. His armies besieged their fortress of Masyaf, about 30 miles north-west of Homs.

No further hostilities developed. Sinan did not want a huge army camped outside his castle, ravaging the hard-won Nizari lands in Syria. Saladin wanted to preserve his life and family, and he had plenty of other enemies to attend to. Both sides quickly sought peace.

After this, the Assassins generally remained neutral, presumably having given reassurances to Saladin about his personal safety. He seems to have pulled back from further antagonism, and even included them in treaties that might affect their interests.

End of the Assassins

Ultimately, the Assassins failed to overthrow the Seljuq Turks or their successors. They carved out a couple of minor principalities for a time, but little more, and did not hold any major cities. They were eventually brushed aside by much larger, more violent and less easily intimidated military opponents. In 1256–57, they were destroyed by the Mongols in Persia, then neutered by Sultan Baybars and the Mamluks in Syria after 1265.

The Assassins had persisted for more than a century and a half – far longer than might have been expected. Despite being vastly outnumbered by their Sunni enemies, they had made themselves heard, hated and feared. They pushed the bounds of dedication and commitment to new limits. And it is that extraordinary legacy, with all its faults, that deserves to be remembered.

Steve Tibble is a historian and author. His latest book is *Assassins and Templars: A Battle in Myth and Blood* (Yale University Press, 2025)

Hear Greg Jenner and Jonathan Phillips discuss the story of Saladin on an episode of **You're Dead to Me** at *bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07r6hjz*

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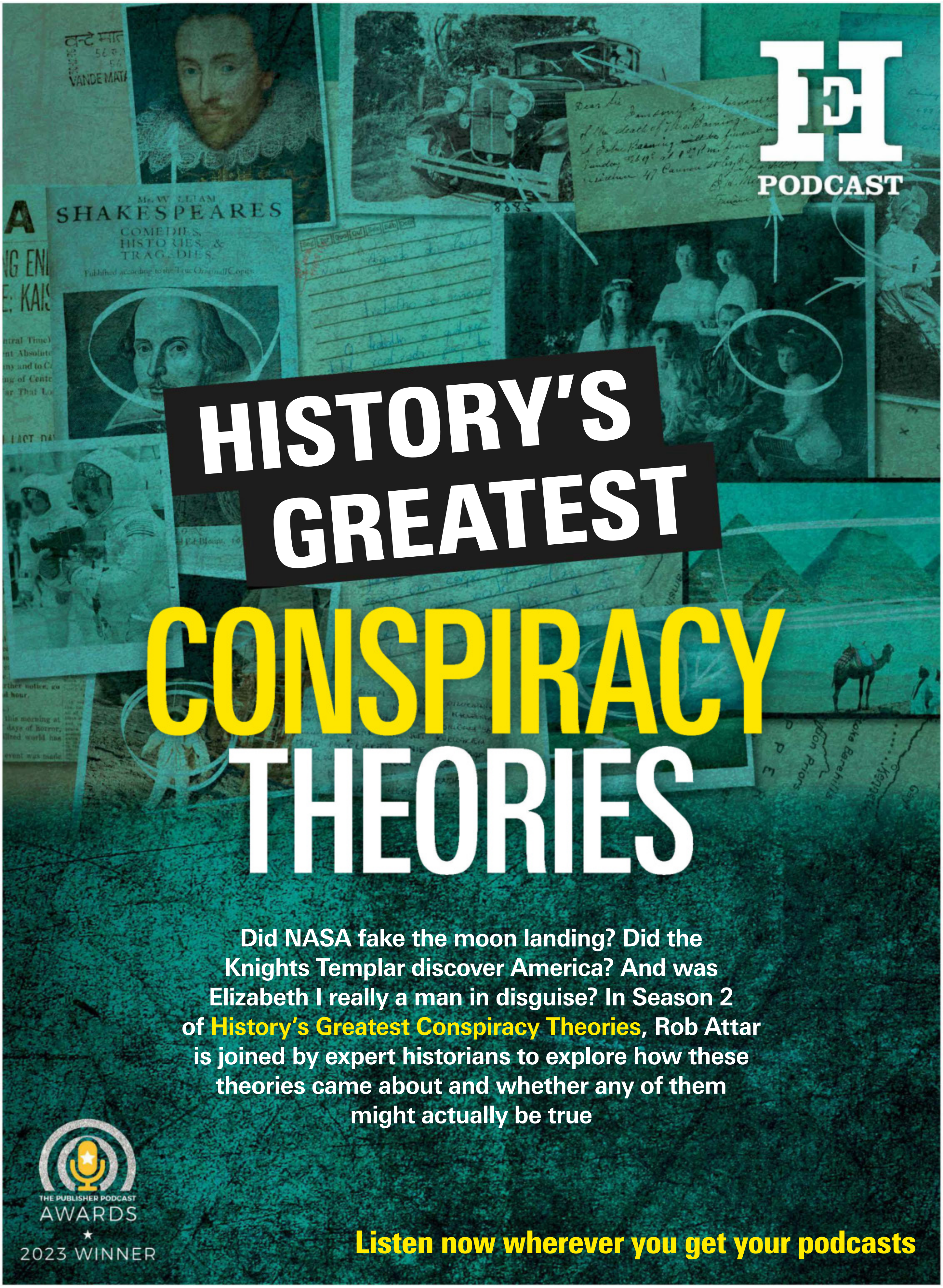

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BOOKS

POLITICAL

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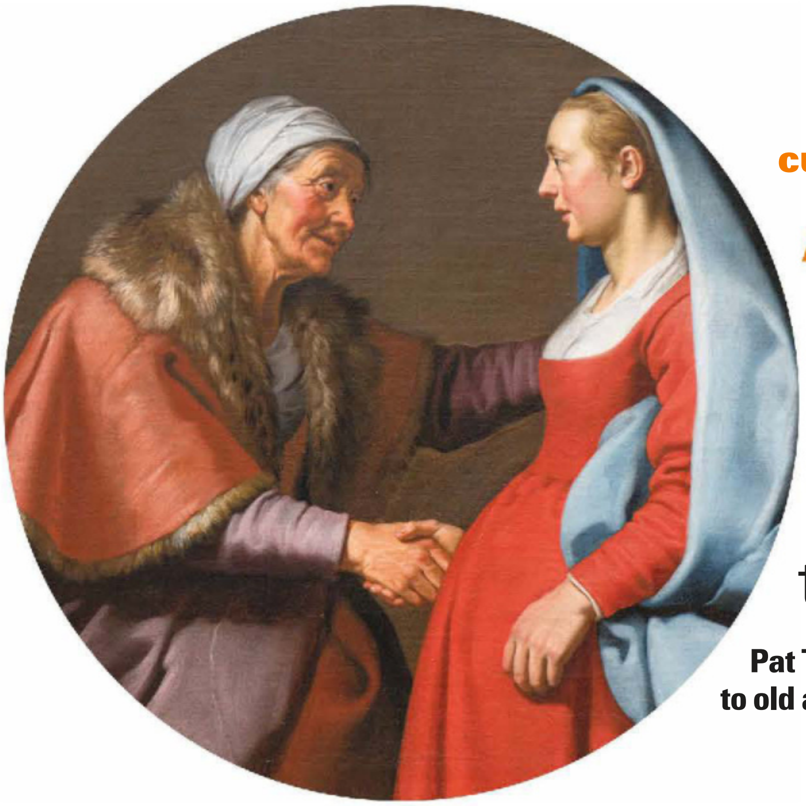
Gilbert M Joseph lauds a masterful new analysis of the intertwined stories of the western continents › page 77



CULTURAL

> “The author challenges the misconception that in ‘the past’ it was rare to live to old age”

Pat Thane enjoys a book exploring attitudes to old age through history › page 74

ROMAN

“The world of the gladiator inspires us to explore ideas of freedom and slavery, sex, honour and death”

Guy de la Bédoyère is impressed by a novel look at the Roman arena › page 72

RELIGION

“Local spiritual needs were met by fusing religious beliefs and practices to create new faiths”

Emma Wilby is fascinated by an examination of Europe’s last pagan peoples › page 76

INTERVIEW

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"Economists studying history tend to focus on men, overlooking the contributions of half the population"

VICTORIA BATEMAN speaks to Danny Bird about the crucial roles women played in historical economies – and how recognising those contributions transforms our understanding of the past

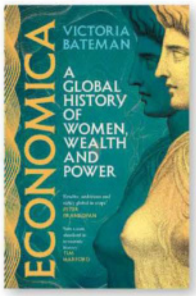
Danny Bird How did you go about uncovering women's central – and obscured – role in economic history?

Victoria Bateman I've taught economic history for 20 years, and I wanted to bring together the many strands of economic history into a single narrative that spans the period from the Stone Age to the present, taking us through glittering civilisations and major economic revolutions, from the birth of farming to the digital age.

Crucially, I wanted to tell this story in a way that includes the lives of women as well as men. Economic history is a repeating cycle of rise and decline: civilisations amass great wealth and achieve extraordinary things before falling into ruin, only to be rediscovered centuries later by archaeologists. You cannot tell that story without including women.

As I show in *Economica*, the most successful economies, regardless of era, have always been those in which women were central to economic life, visibly or invisibly. Likewise, when civilisations decline – whether we're talking about the Roman empire, the Islamic world or imperial China – there's a strong correlation between economic deterioration and the marginalisation of women.

So I set out to write a new global economic history: one that views the past through the eyes of women without excluding men. This is a history of everyone – an economic history that shows how, once you add women and stir, your understanding of the past is transformed.



Economica: A Global History of Women, Wealth and Power
by Victoria Bateman
(Headline Press,
432 pages, £25)

You open with a woman hunting in the Stone Age. Why has that image been overlooked, and what does that reveal about modern biases in archaeology and economics?

When we think of the Stone Age, we often picture stone tools – items that survive in archaeological digs. However, for millennia early societies produced things that were largely perishable – objects such as baskets, fishing nets and clothing – which have long since disintegrated.

Women were heavily involved in producing these now-lost goods, which haven't endured in the way that stone or metal tools have. Because so few of them remain, women's contributions have often been overlooked. There's been a tendency to assume that women simply stayed in the cave, caring for children, while men made tools.

Skeletal remains and hunting equipment are among the few surviving traces of early life. For a long time, archaeologists assumed that if someone was buried with hunting tools, they must be male, reflecting the entrenched belief in a clear division of labour: men as hunters, women as gatherers.

It's only in the past few decades that this assumption has been challenged. Advances in DNA analysis and, more recently, examinations of teeth, have revealed that some individuals presumed to be male hunters were, in fact, female.

Among early populations in the Americas, for instance, perhaps 40 per cent [or more] of big game hunters were women, previously misidentified because the default assumption was that hunters were male. The belief in strict gender roles from the beginning of human history has profoundly shaped how we view men and women today.

You argue that women's economic freedom determines a civilisation's rise or fall. Is there a clear example of that in history?

Let's compare the Romans with the ancient Greeks before them, often seen as the cradle of European civilisation. They've long been credited as the founders of democracy, but in many ways ancient Greek society resembled modern-day Afghanistan. Women were expected to fully cover their bodies and remain confined to the home. A strict guardianship system denied them legal autonomy, and they couldn't start businesses or earn their own income.

Despite the Greeks' cultural and political achievements, their economy never matched that of the Romans. I believe that's partly because they operated on just one cylinder – men – while neglecting the contributions of women.

In contrast, the Etruscans in Italy were far more progressive regarding women – and they helped spark Roman civilisation. In ancient Rome, women could own shops and ships, and trade cloth, wine and olive oil across the Mediterranean. While Roman society remained patriarchal, and a version of the guardianship system persisted in theory, it was far less rigid in practice. Women were visible and active.

A good example is Julia Felix. She was a property developer in Pompeii who had an apartment building, a bathhouse and a restaurant. Historians think she came from a freed slave family. Such women thrived.

However, as the Roman Republic gave way to the empire, that began to change. Augustus embraced rhetoric claiming that the

PROFILE

Victoria Bateman is a fellow of the Royal Historical Society and visiting lecturer at Gresham College. Her previous books include *Naked Feminism: Breaking the Cult of Female Modesty* (Polity, 2023) and *The Sex Factor: How Women Made the West Rich* (Polity, 2019)

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAMIEN MCFADDEN

empire was being overrun by foreigners, and argued that women should focus less on paid work and more on producing children for the good of Rome. He manipulated and shaped marriage and inheritance laws to push women into early marriage and motherhood, even tying their husbands' careers to their fertility.

This pronatalist stance gradually sidelined women's contributions, weakening the Roman economy. At first, favourable conditions such as good weather allowed Rome to mask this fragility. But beneath the flourishing fields and olive groves, they were eroding the very foundation of their success.

> " The Peasants' Revolt wasn't just a challenge to the class structure but also to the patriarchal order, driving a shift in power between men and women "

How did dowries and bride prices shape ideas of women's power, status and value in societies?

Even today, when a woman marries, it's still common across the world for money to change hands, whether from the bride's family to the groom's or vice versa.

In the case of bride price, the groom or his family transfers money to the bride's family. Some may interpret this as 'buying' a wife. Dowry, on the other hand, involves the bride bringing assets, typically money, from her family into the marriage, which the couple can then draw upon.

These financial exchanges were historically very common. What's interesting is that, whereas dowries are often discussed in popular culture, bride price has been far more prevalent. The practice of paying for a wife highlights how women have long been viewed as valuable – something worth compensating a family for upon her marriage.

To modern British sensibilities, this may seem archaic or even unthinkable. Yet, historically, it reveals the extent to which value was placed on women. However, that value rarely translated into autonomy or benefit for the women themselves. Being valued doesn't always mean being treated with dignity or given freedom.

What role did women play in the medieval economy?

One of my favourite moments in history is the Peasants' Revolt. As an economic historian, it's a fascinating time, especially in relation to the broader transition from feudalism to capitalism and the shift from a rural, land-based economy to a more urban, market-oriented one.

The revolt itself symbolised ordinary people fighting for rights: to farm in ways that benefited themselves rather than local lords, to establish businesses in towns, and to gain greater autonomy. A key focus of my book is the significant role that women played in this revolt. It wasn't just a challenge to the class structure – serfs versus lords – but also to the patriarchal order. We see a shift in power between men and women.

That was the late 14th century, in the aftermath of the Black Death, which wiped out between a third and a half of the population. Labour shortages fuelled a sense among working people that they were valuable and deserved better pay, rights and treatment – sentiments that culminated in the revolt. At the same time, the shortage of men meant that farms and trades increasingly relied on women. Sectors such as farming and cloth-making saw high female participation.

As home brewing gave way to larger commercial breweries, people were eager to enjoy themselves after years of plague, and women brewers – already major producers – stepped up to meet demand. Pubs began to flourish and, by the early 15th century, London brewers had formed their own guild, around 40 per cent of whose members were women. It was also common for married couples to run breweries together.

This was also when the stereotypical 'dairymaid' emerged. With more people able to afford meat, particularly beef, women were involved in rearing cattle, tending, milking and raising livestock, even if the animals were ultimately destined for slaughter.

Cloth-making, too, was on the rise. Although England had not yet overtaken the great Italian centres of production such as Genoa and Venice by that time, it was beginning to move in that direction. So this period excites me the most – and highlighting the role of women during that time has been one of the most rewarding aspects of the book.

By the time of the industrial revolution, women were working everywhere – from factories to farms – but their labour is still missing from economic history. What explains this invisibility, and what changes in our understanding of history when we acknowledge their role?

Economic history has largely been written by men, for men and about men. When we think of the key figures of the industrial revolution such as Richard Arkwright and Samuel Greg or, on the American side, JP Morgan and Rockefeller, they're all men, celebrated as heroic pioneers. More generally, when we think of merchants, bankers and industrialists, it's men who come to mind. This isn't to diminish their contributions; all of those figures feature in the book. But there were also many women who were equally important yet have largely been excluded from economic history.

This may be partly because economic history is shaped by both historians and economists. Historians tend to be more open to recognising women's roles, whereas economists often approach the subject from an ahistorical perspective.

Open a typical economics textbook and you might find, buried towards the back, a brief section on how women entered the workforce in the 20th century. It might note how married women's labour-force participation rose from 6 per cent at the start of the century to over half by the end, creating the impression that women spent millennia as housewives before then.

So when economists have turned to economic history, they've tended to focus on men, overlooking the contributions of half the population. That's such a shame, isn't it?

Neolithic woven baskets from c5200–4600 BC, discovered in a Spanish cave. Such perishable items, often produced by women, rarely survive in the archaeological record

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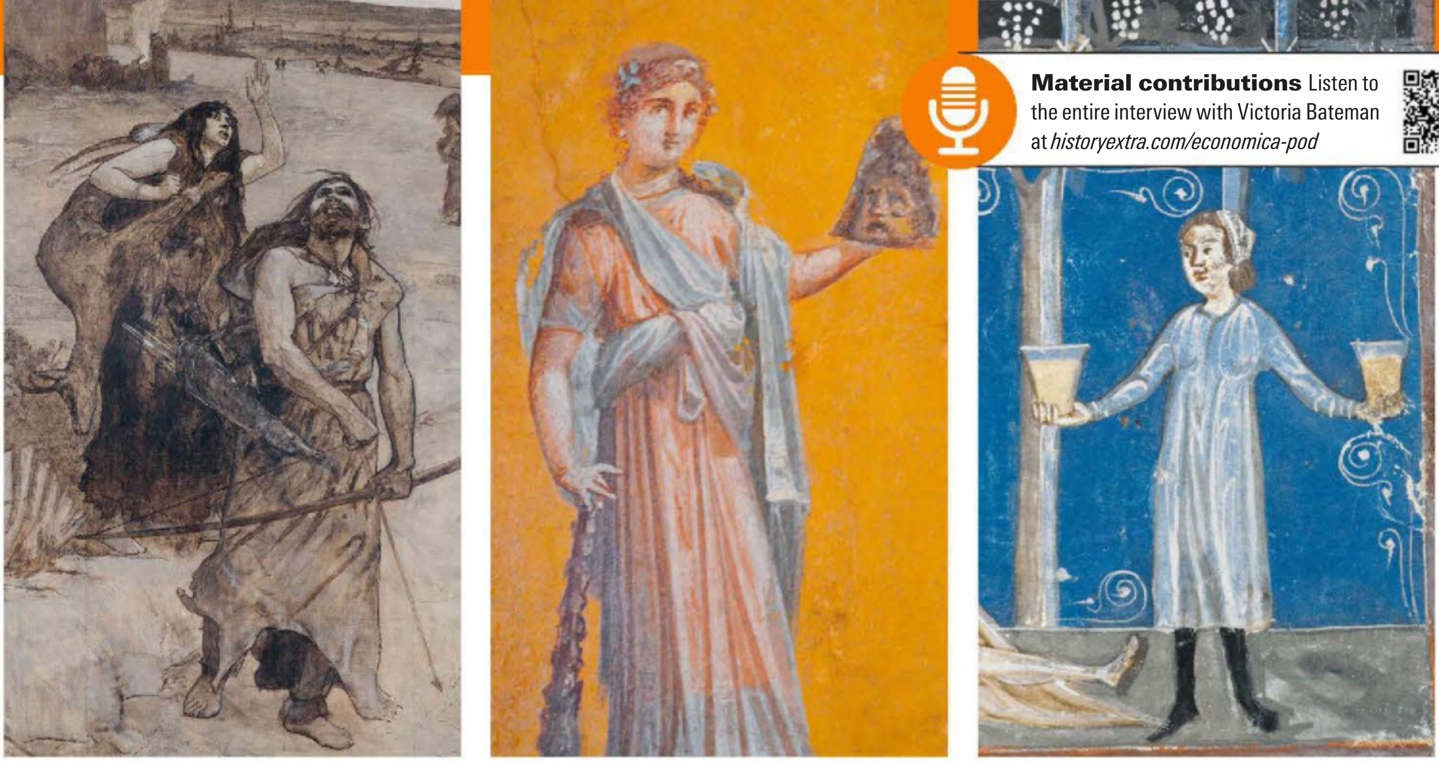
Sex workers, concubines and pirates feature in your book. What roles did they play, and how does including them reshape our understanding of economic contributions?

That's a good question, and it relates very much to



Hidden figures FROM LEFT: A 19th-century picture of ancient people hunting. Women played an active role in this processs; a fresco from the house of the successful female Roman property developer Julia Felix in Pompeii; a manuscript illustration from the 14th century, when many women were brewing beer

Material contributions Listen to the entire interview with Victoria Bateman at *historyextra.com/economica-pod*

another female figure in my book: Priscilla Wakefield. A banker and writer active in the 18th and 19th centuries, Wakefield was also a pioneering feminist who authored 17 books and founded the first English bank for women and children. Her first client was a 14-year-old orphan who deposited £2.

Wakefield argued that poverty stemmed from women being denied the chance to develop skills and access skilled work. She proposed that education and vocational training should be shaped by class. Working-class women should be steered towards trades such as tailoring and hairdressing, which she believed should be reserved for women. Middle-class women like herself were encouraged to pursue more intellectual or administrative work.

Though she strongly supported women's right to paid employment, she rejected sex work as legitimate labour, viewing it as immoral. This perspective, common at the time, led many female philanthropists to try to 'rescue' women from what they considered unrespectable work. This created a harmful divide between the 'respectable' and 'unrespectable' woman – an idea that spread across the British empire. Personally, I believe that feminism must include all women, respecting the choices they make with their minds and bodies, provided they are made freely.

On the topic of unconventional women's work, the legendary 19th-century pirate Zheng Yi Sao offers a striking contrast. She began her career as a sex worker on a floating brothel in the South China Sea, where she met and married a pirate. After his death, she took command of their fleet, which grew to be three times the size of the Chinese navy. She introduced a pirate code enforcing fair loot distribution and better treatment of captives. A formidable force when fighting against both European powers and the Chinese emperor, she eventually negotiated a pardon, was granted a noble title and died peacefully. She remains an enduring icon in Hong Kong.

How does focusing on ownership, land, capital and wealth rather than just wages change our understanding of the gender gap and long-term inequality?

If we consider who owns the planet, fewer than 15 per cent of landowners globally are women. I say that cautiously because, though economists have been quite good at collecting wage data, allowing us to measure the gender pay gap, they've been far less effective when it comes to data on wealth, such as land and property ownership. There's a lack of gender-disaggregated data in this area.

There's still much work to be done for us to fully understand the distribution of wealth and assets. But if there were as many female billionaires as male, we'd see six or seven times more women like Taylor Swift, Oprah Winfrey or Sheryl Sandberg than we do today.

The gender gap in wealth – property, land and assets – is far greater than the gender pay gap, which is around 20 per cent globally. Wealth disparities are far more severe – and, of course, wealth tends to be passed down through generations, often along male lines in many societies. Wealth begets wealth and, to build a successful business, one needs both time and capital. Historically, women have been disadvantaged on both fronts.

When it comes to time, women have traditionally been cast as caregivers, spending more time in pregnancy and breastfeeding, and caring for children, elderly parents and in-laws, leaving them with less time for paid work or enterprise. Financially, women have also faced systemic barriers. These include inheritance systems favouring men, banks being reluctant to lend to women, and exclusion from universities, gentlemen's clubs and learned societies – the social networks through which opportunities and investment often flow.

All of this contributes to a significantly wider gender gap in wealth than in wages, leaving women in a more precarious economic position. Though one in three businesses globally is owned by a woman, these are often smaller, less capitalised and employ fewer people, struggling more than those owned by men.

Are you hopeful that, in future, women will enjoy greater recognition for their enormous contribution to economies?

We're on a knife-edge when it comes to women's lives today. It's vital that we don't repeat one of the greatest mistakes in human history, undoing the progress we've made.

We've come a long way in reclaiming ground lost, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when women were increasingly confined to roles as housewives and mothers. The very notion of 'the housewife' was a construct of Victorian society. But we must ensure that we protect the progress achieved, continue to move forward, and never return to square one by repeating the mistakes of the past. H

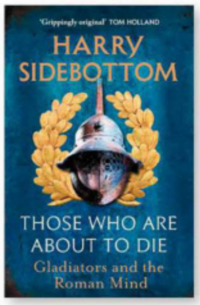
AKG/BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY

Theatre of death
Rome's Colosseum held upwards of 50,000 people watching various spectacles – though "none has gripped the modern imagination more than combat involving highly trained warriors who fought to the death", says Guy de la Bédoyère

ROMAN

Fighting talk

GUY DE LA BÉDOYÈRE is impressed by a deep dive into the world of ancient Roman gladiators that shines a light on diverse aspects of that civilisation


'Grippingly original' TOM HOLLAND
HARRY SIDEBOTTOM
THOSE WHO ARE ABOUT TO DIE
Gladiators and the Roman Mind

Those Who Are About to Die: Gladiators and the Roman Mind
by Harry Sidebottom
Hutchinson Heinemann,
416 pages, £25

The most intriguing aspect of this book is that it's written as a sort of 'life in the day' of the Colosseum, that vast edifice begun in Rome by the emperor Vespasian (AD 69–79) to entertain the masses. It's an engaging way to tackle this most emotive, disgusting and enthralling side of Roman life, and takes account of the evidence that is scattered across space and time "to build a composite picture of a typical night and day at the gladiatorial games". As one dives further into the book, though, it transpires that this is really a much broader survey – and a very successful one, at that – not just of gladiators but of the wider Roman world.

The Colosseum was home to all sorts of public spectacles, but none has gripped the modern imagination more than combat involving those highly trained warriors who fought to the death, each armed and equipped according to one of several specialisms. There can be few people who visit the Colosseum – or other Roman amphitheatres, such as those in Pompeii (the oldest stone amphitheatre in the Roman world) and El Djem in Tunisia – who do not spare a thought for those who died in the noise and tumult of the arena, speared by a trident or run through with a short sword. That these buildings existed at all is a comment on the Romans' enduring love of violence. Of course, we probably all have a lurking suspicion that a revival of such games in our own time might be worryingly successful.

As author Harry Sidebottom points out, the gladiator was both "reviled and idealised", even in antiquity. There is no shortage of depictions of gladiators in the form of scrawled sketches on the walls of houses in Pompeii, paintings of them in tombs, and graffiti extolling the virtues of the favourite performers. Conversely, the philosopher Seneca – tutor to

GETTY IMAGES

> **So resilient were gladiators in the minds of Romans that even the po-faced Christians struggled to wind up the savage thrills**

the emperor Nero – expressed his disgust at the gratuitous bloodshed in the arena for the benefit of bored and inattentive crowds who had grown immune to the gore and death.

Sidebottom identifies something crucial about gladiators and their ubiquitous presence in Roman culture. They act as a portal for us into that ancient world, revealing all sorts of aspects of Roman life that might not seem immediately connected but in fact are. Contemplating the world of the gladiator inspires us to explore ideas of freedom and slavery, sex (there were more than a few women – and doubtless more than a few men – who admitted to being titillated by their muscular heroes), strength and honour, religion, tradition, imperial beneficence and, perhaps above all, death.

One intriguing chapter discusses how the Romans measured time. Dividing the night and day into 12 hours each, in summer they simply shortened the night hours and lengthened the daylight hours, and vice-versa in the winter. In our precision, atomic-clock era, such a flexible and imaginative practical solution would seem insane. This sort of diversion is an enticing characteristic of this entertaining and informative book, and separates it from many other works on the subject.

Blaze of glory

Gladiators were showcase performers, amply fed and trained. Grim though their prospects might seem to us today, the alternatives were the demeaning and grisly prospects of slavery and execution. Perhaps a brief blaze across the firmament with even the chance, however small, of fame and glory and even freedom was more compelling.

As individuals, they might preen and flaunt themselves in the arena. En masse, and sometimes in their hundreds, they could act as displays of imperial largesse. Diverse in their origins, they represented all corners of the sprawling empire.

"The Romans were good at killing people," writes Sidebottom, and catalogues their extensive range of ingenious and efficient execution methods. Everyone was brutalised. A gladiator who showed mercy risked his own death: Diodorus, for example, was killed for failing to finish off his opponent.

Gladiators died in their droves, but so, too, did some of the spectators – not because they were killed by errant spears or swords (though that did happen once when a gladiator spotted his hated rival in the audience) but because the venue collapsed. In AD 27, an enterprising ex-slave laid on a gladiatorial display at Fidenae, not far from Rome. Like so many crooks before and since, he scrimped on the facilities to maximise his profit. The wooden amphitheatre he had commissioned was hopelessly inadequate for the eager spectators, and disintegrated mid-show, reportedly killing 50,000 (probably a rounded metaphorical figure rather than an accurate count) and presumably injuring many more.

So resilient were gladiators in the minds of Romans that even the po-faced Christians struggled to wind up the savage thrills. An imaginative and fanatical bishop in Apamea, Syria in the late fourth century AD came up with a solution to the enduring pagan temples: he simply hired a gang of gladiators to trash them. Perhaps he was inspired by Julius Caesar who, more than four centuries earlier, was said to have owned 5,000 gladiators, organising fights for an unprecedented 320 pairs in 65 BC. His shameless showmanship terrified his political rivals, because it was obvious how many armed men this most ambitious of Romans could call on. That was less than a decade after the Spartacus War (or Third Servile War), when a band of gladiators – led by one of their own – had unleashed on Rome a devastating slave rebellion and defeated various armies before it was finally crushed.

Overall, then, the author has amassed a vast amount of epic detail in an engaging and absorbing exploration of this most idiosyncratic of Roman customs, and embedded it in a panopticon take on the era. H

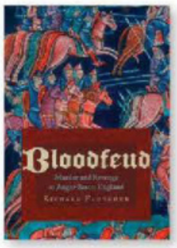
Guy de la Bédoyère is a historian and writer. His latest book is *The Confessions of Samuel Pepys: His Private Revelations* (Abacus, 2025)

A first-century AD relief depicts gladiators fighting lions during *venationes* – public spectacles involving animals

GETTY IMAGES

THE CLASSIC BOOK

David Woodman on an enthralling **account of a brutal betrayal and medieval feud**



Bloodfeud: Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England
by Richard Fletcher
(Allen Lane, 2002)

In 1016, the Dane Cnut conquered the English kingdom and its then ruler, Æthelred. It was an event that brought many changes to England, which had been ruled by kings of the West Saxon line for generations. Soon after his victory, Cnut requested the submission of the powerful Earl of Northumbria, Uhtred, at an unidentified place called Wiheal.

It was the kind of negotiation that must have happened routinely in the wake of the conquest. Uhtred, given a promise of safe passage, went to the meeting accompanied by 40 of his men. But a text of the late 11th or early 12th century known as *De Obsessione Dunelmi* (On the Siege of Durham) reveals how a certain Thurbrand and a group of soldiers, having been hidden behind a curtain, murdered Uhtred and his men. It was a shocking betrayal that triggered a feud between the families of Uhtred and Thurbrand that lasted for generations.

Published in 2002, Richard Fletcher's book masterfully brings this story of Northumbrian feuding to life, introducing readers to the realities of events in 11th-century England. I first came across it as a new postgraduate student, having studied Anglo-Norman Durham historical writing for my undergraduate dissertation, and was in awe of the way Fletcher explicated such a complex text.

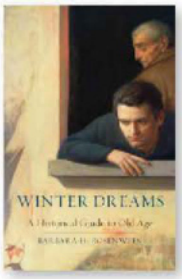
It is a fine example of history that is firmly grounded on textual evidence from the early medieval period and which appeals to a broad audience. As a northerner myself, I was utterly absorbed by the book, written in engaging and accessible prose. H

David Woodman is professor of history at Robinson College, Cambridge. His new book is *The First King of England: Æthelstan and the Birth of a Kingdom* (Princeton University Press)

CULTURAL

Golden years

PAT THANE commends a richly detailed study of attitudes to older people through history



Winter Dreams: A Historical Guide to Old Age
by Barbara H Rosenwein
Reaktion, 264 pages, £20

Barbara Rosenwein opens her new book with descriptions of the diverse ways her female friends and relatives have experienced old age – some declining into dementia, others enjoying healthy, independent activity until death in their eighties. She was inspired, as a historian of the emotions, to explore feelings about old age – the "winter dreams" of the title – experienced by older people themselves. Here she also examines how others feel about older people, and how such sentiments have been expressed through history.

Additionally, she seeks – successfully – to challenge stereotypes about older people as an undifferentiated group, along with another common misconception that in 'the past' it was rare to live to old age. Though there are no firm population statistics for any society before the 18th century, there is strong evidence that in ancient Rome about 5 per cent of the population was aged over 60. Indeed, most societies assumed the existence of an aged population long before numbers rose dramatically in richer countries through the 20th century as infant mortality declined and more people lived longer.

Expressions of feelings about ageing are, though, sparse until the recent past, and mostly produced by elite male writers. This is unfortunate because wherever information can be traced, women have outlived men, forming the majority of the aged and of the aged poor, another major group underrepresented in sources. Rosenwein explores what sources she can, confirming that old age has been a recognised phase of life in all known societies, always with diverse characteristics that evolve with cultural change.

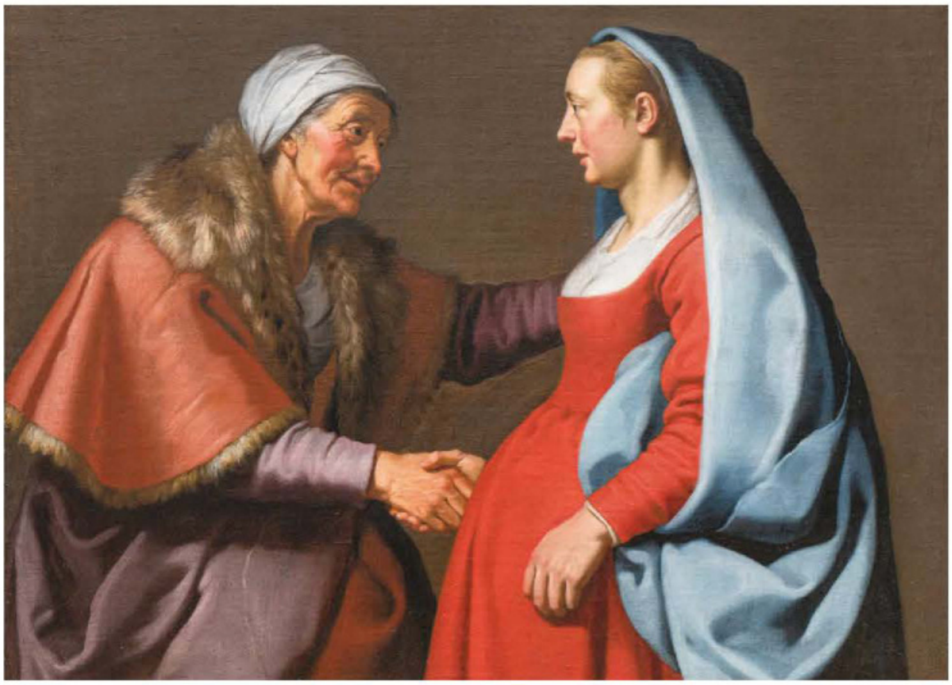
In ancient Greece, writers and philosophers including Homer, Socrates and Aristotle described mainly comfortable, happy later lives, writing about the power of older men in politics and culture. A rare female writer, Sappho, described the frailty of an older woman. Writers record how younger people were expected to care for ageing relatives, starting a long history of the diverse realities of intergenerational relationships, from antagonism to affection, which still continues today. Rosenwein describes similar situations and traditions in ancient China, where they also endure, and in ancient Rome, where the physician Galen first recommended now-familiar habits of exercise and good diet to meet growing desires for a healthy old age.

From an impressive range of sources, Rosenwein traces changing and continuing experiences, expectations and tensions, along with negative and positive perceptions of old age in early Judaism, Islam and Christianity. She then explores stories about the poor from medieval Europe, as charities and states began to support those too old to work, and outlines the growth of welfare for the aged poor to the present. Among much else, we learn about old age in an Indigenous American community, as observed by Europeans in the late 17th and 18th centuries: older men and women are represented as holding power and respect, while the frail and poor are supported.

From the mid-20th century, oral histories provide more insights, notably a fascinating analysis of interviews with formerly enslaved people in 1930s US. (Rosenwein might also have used written comments on the topic by a substantial group of women, old and young, collected in the UK in 1992 by Mass Observation.) They confirm the focus of the book on the enduring diversity of experiences and attitudes, which provides a rich study of continuity and change through recorded history. ■

> **In ancient Rome, the physician Galen recommended habits of exercise and good diet for a healthy old age**

Pat Thane is visiting professor in history at Birkbeck College, University of London

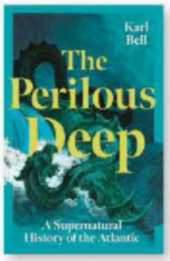


GETTY IMAGES

Facing old age A 17th-century Dutch painting depicts women of very different ages. Despite modern assumptions, older people comprised significant proportions of many societies from ancient times

FOLKLORE

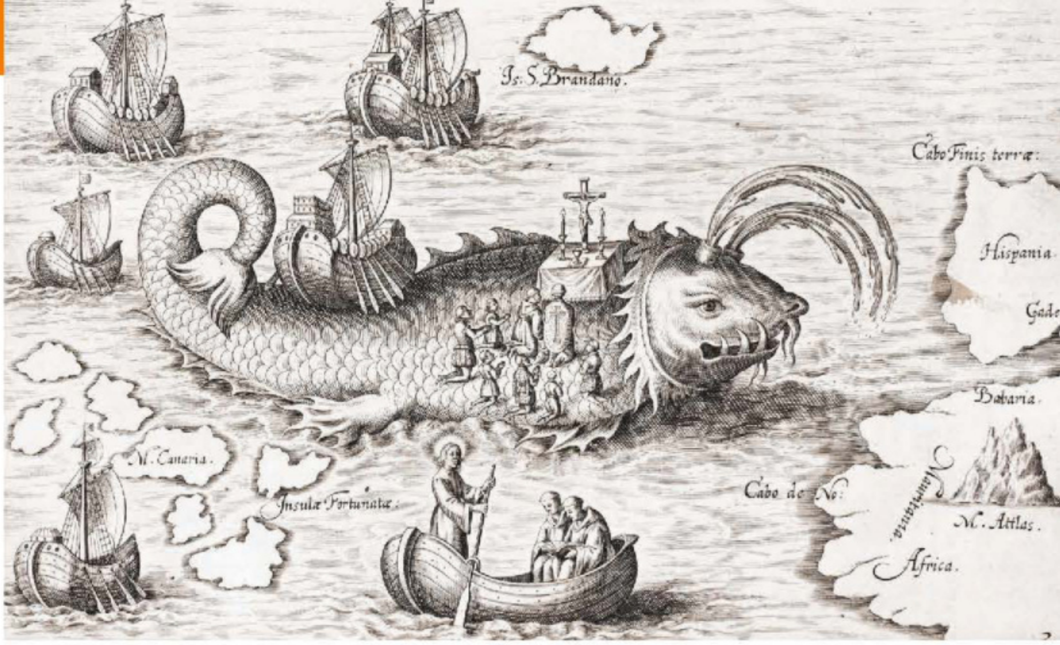
Plumbing ocean depths



The Perilous Deep: A Supernatural History of the Atlantic
by Karl Bell
Reaktion, 336 pages, £18

This is a history of margins and fringes – not only of the Atlantic Ocean itself, but also of the imaginations of those who worked on its surface and lived at its edges. In his new book, Karl Bell draws on everything from street ballads to scientific treatises, mariners' memoirs, newspaper advertisements, paintings and literature. The focus is on the mid-18th to the mid-20th century, but with historical influences that stretch like ribbons of seaweed back into the medieval and classical worlds.

With chapters covering maritime magic, hauntings on the high seas and monsters of the deep, this is an uncanny cornucopia of folklore, hovering on the borderlands between fact and fiction. We meet the humorously outlandish (a 16th-century 'sea monk' nearly 8 feet long), the superstitiously transactional (babies' cauls for sale, taxidermised mermaids), and the downright diabolical (a Cornish shipwrecker dragged to hell by the devil himself).


Is. S. Brandano.
Cabo Finis terræ.
Hispania
Gade
Babaria
M. Canaria.
Insulæ Fortunatæ.
Cabo de No.
Mauritania.
M. Atlas.
Africa.

Saints and sea giants Saint Brendan and his crew celebrate mass aboard a whale in a 1621 engraving. Seemingly outlandish tales of maritime monsters speak of historical fears of the Atlantic Ocean

The transatlantic scope draws on the maritime folklore not only of Europe but also of Africa and the Americas. Here we meet the darkest horrors: the water spirit Mami Wata, crossing with the slave ships from Africa to the American South.

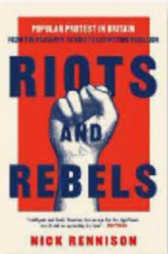
This is a tale that grows stronger in the telling, and it is perhaps in the later chapters that Bell's writing is at its most sparkling. Here, the coast is a location of "brackish folklore, a place where selkies, mermaids, sea serpents and ghosts ventured ashore", of Coleridge's "hallucinogenic nightmare of a poem", of Captain Jack Sparrow sashaying around "like a drunken catwalk model".

Ultimately, this book is about the "primal unease" that humans feel when confronted with the raw power of the ocean. As Bell explains, "much maritime magic and folklore was about negotiation, adaptation and vigilance". Far from being a concern of the past, this matters more than ever because, as Bell concludes, "beneath all the barnacle-like accrual of magic, marvels and monsters, those seafaring attitudes can still teach us how to confront our own environmental fears as we attempt to navigate the turbulent currents of an uncertain future, seeking its unknown shores".

Eleanor Barraclough, historian, broadcaster and writer. A reader in public history at Bath Spa University, her latest book is *Embers of the Hands: Hidden Histories of the Viking Age* (Profile, 2024)

SOCIAL

Raising our voice



Riots and Rebels: Popular Protest in Britain from the Peasants' Revolt to Extinction Rebellion
by Nick Rennison
Oldcastle, 256 pages, £16.99

As the abolitionist Frederick Douglass argued in 1857, if there is no struggle there is no progress. "Those who profess to favour freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground," he said, "they want rain without thunder and lightning." Nick Rennison's book is an accessible history of these stormy struggles in Britain, with all the violence and pain involved.

Britain was not always as civilised and tranquil as it has often been remembered, but instead has been filled with repression, injustice and the great protests of ordinary people. From revolts in the Middle Ages to modern climate-change marches, these are histories worth returning to, punctuating the nationalist mythologies of a homogeneous and placid island past.

People make their own history, but Rennison forgets the second part of Karl Marx's famous aphorism – that people do not make it just as they please, under circumstances chosen by themselves. What of the economic systems that exploited and repressed the people? We rapidly jump from one event to another without being given any real sense of their connections and how the traditions of dead generations feed into the brains of the living. Working people feature in the stories Rennison recounts, but class, the deep division between forces of property and those who have none, is quietly absent.

Finally, colonialism seems like the elephant in the room. This is a history of violence in Britain but is removed from the destructive bonds of empire imposed on subjects not just abroad but also within the Motherland. "The sun never set on the British empire" was the often-repeated boast – to which the Chartist Ernest Jones replied: "And the blood never dried." Without any discussion of empire and race, some of the riots discussed seem like strange and overheated quibbles over Bible readings or skin pigmentation.

Despite these omissions, this book is an engaging and wide-ranging first dip into the topic, serving as an important reminder of resistance in Britain's past.

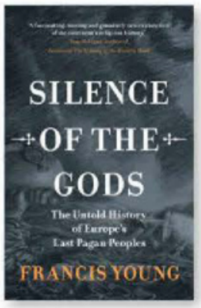
Shirin Hirsch, senior lecturer in history at Manchester Metropolitan University and a researcher at the People's History Museum

BRIDGEMAN

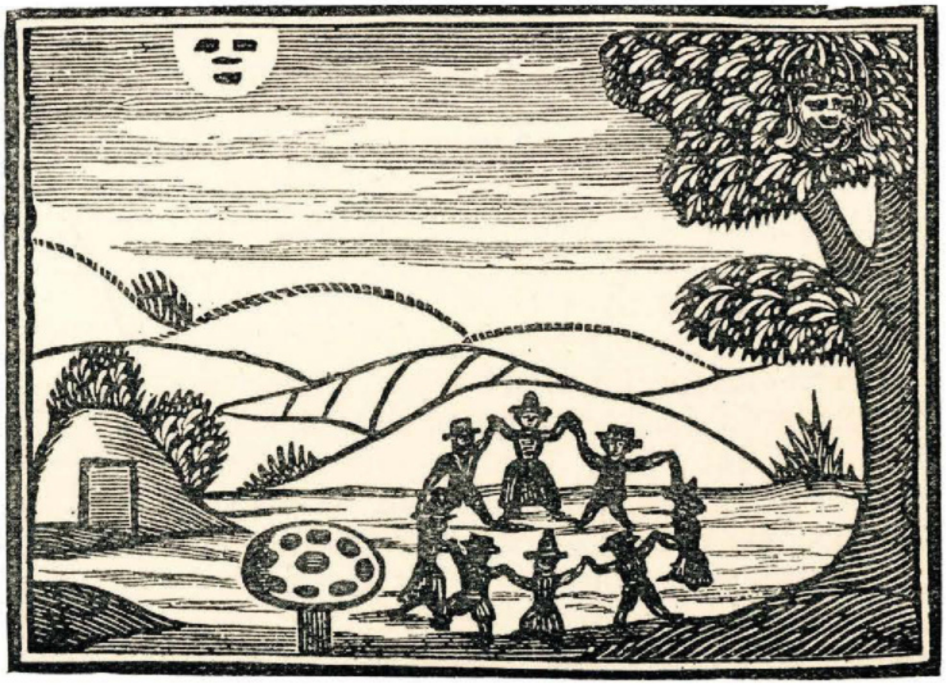
RELIGION

Adapting ancient beliefs

EMMA WILBY is fascinated by a look at how long-held religions and traditions of pre-Christian Europe endured right into the modern era



Silence of the Gods: The Untold History of Europe's Last Pagan Peoples
by Francis Young
Cambridge University Press,
456 pages, £25



Ancient beliefs Fairies dance in a ring near their mount in a woodcut of c1600. Did customs such as leaving out milk for fairies indicate residual pagan beliefs, or were they simply "popular Christian deviance"?

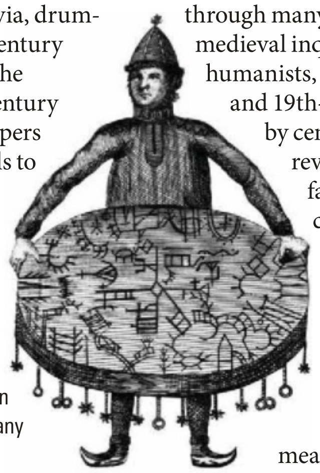
Whether vestiges of paganism survived Europe's Christianisation is a subject of enduring fascination. Scholarly debate navigates between the 'maximalist' position (much survived) and the 'minimalist' (nothing survived). For the former, a medieval farmer leaving out bowls of milk for fairies or the dead was testament to the persistence of an archaic devotion to ancestor spirits. For the latter, the practice was simply an unorthodox element of 'popular' Christian religion.

Francis Young carves a genuinely original path though this polarity, providing the first comparative analysis of cultures from the northern and eastern peripheries of the European continent that, while officially converted by the end of the 14th century, remained wholly or partly 'unchristianised' for centuries beyond this date. These 'last pagan peoples', Young argues, have been largely overlooked in the historiography of European religion, with textual evidence scarce and relevant scholarship being typically local in scope and unavailable in English.

Young's chronological analysis unearths some astonishing unorthodoxies: snake cults in 16th-century Lithuania, werewolf metamorphoses in 17th-century Latvia, drumming trance-journeys in 18th-century Lapland and animist rituals in the Volga-Ural region in the 19th century that drew thousands of worshippers to watch priests sacrifice animals to the Keremet nature spirit.

We are invited to view these peripheral practices through many different sets of eyes: from medieval inquisitors to Renaissance humanists, Enlightenment philosophers and 19th-century folklorists. Century by century, these shifting lenses reveal the complex interacting factors that enabled these cultures to remain unchristianised for so long and in such diverse ways.

> **"Thousands of worshippers watched priests sacrifice animals in the 19th century"**



Ritual spirit An 18th-century copper engraving shows a Sámi shaman from Norway with his drum – one of many belief systems explored in a new book

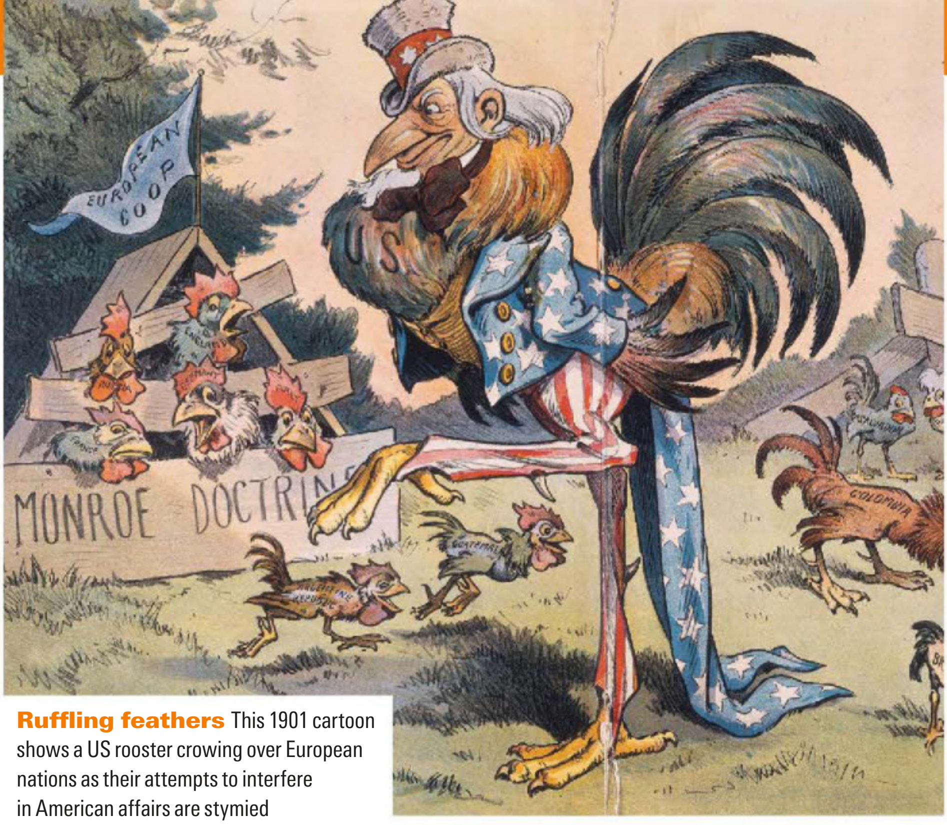
With respect to the 'pagan survivals' debate, the greatest insights emerge from extended analyses of what 'unchristianised' really means. For Young, the term does not imply a retention of pristine paganism: all the cultures examined had some exposure to Christianity and were changed by it. Nor does it presume any crypto-religious compromise that hid pagan substance beneath Christian veneer. Instead, it points to models of religious creolisation of the kind that took place when Christianity encountered the cultures of the Caribbean and Latin America. Local spiritual needs were met by fusing religious beliefs and practices to create new faiths that were coherent on their own terms.

While these European creoles could be superficially similar to contemporary forms of popular Christianity, they were distinct in that their unorthodox elements were informed by a cultural memory of their pre-Christian significance.

Through Young's lens, whether the folk practice of leaving out bowls of milk for the fairies reflects popular Christian deviance or residual paganism depends on context: and, as he illustrates, context is often more subtle and surprising than previously supposed. H

Emma Wilby is an honorary fellow in history at the University of Exeter

ALAMY

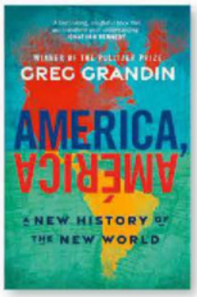


Ruffling feathers This 1901 cartoon shows a US rooster crowing over European nations as their attempts to interfere in American affairs are stymied

GLOBAL

Continental rift

GILBERT M JOSEPH is enthused by a novel exploration of the intertwined stories of North and Latin America



America, América: A New History of the New World
by Greg Grandin
Torva, 768 pages, £30

What is America? And who is an American? These questions lie at the heart of Greg Grandin's provocative new book, which also wrestles with a broader question: do the Americas, North and South, share a common history?

Grandin undertakes a comparative exploration of "the New World's long history of ideological and ethical contestation", looking as far back as the Spanish conquest and the Puritan settlement, and as far forward as globalisation's muddled present. His mode of analysis is steeped in what philosophers refer to as "immanent critique… a form of dissent in which challengers don't dismiss the legitimacy of their rivals' worldview but rather accuse them of not living up to their own stated ideals". He sees it as a particularly useful method for considering the dynamic, interactive relationship between the two Americas, because Latin America gave the US what other empires lacked: "its own magpie, an irrepressible critic."

Across 50 lively and lavishly documented chapters, Grandin reveals that when Latin Americans – be they politicians, intellectuals, priests or poets – judged residents of the US, who they always regarded as 'fellow Americans', they did so "from a shared first premise: America was a redeemer continent, and its historical mission was to strengthen the ideal of human equality". Unfortunately, these lofty goals were not always matched by their northern neighbours, who pressed a proprietary claim to 'America' that excluded Latin Americans even as they progressively dispossessed them of their land, labour and goods.

> **"Through the author we experience the intensity of political debate on the eve of the 18th-century American revolutions"**

What makes this truly new and conceptually exciting is its commitment to transcending old narratives of exploitation, of hemispheric haves and have nots. The bitter reality and enduring legacies of inequality and exploitation remain in full view. But the relationship between the Americas is portrayed as complicated yet reciprocal, with periods of collaboration, joint purpose and possibly even affection – for example, during the 1930s, under Franklin D Roosevelt and Mexican president Lázaro Cárdenas's New Deal partnership. More often, especially during the US-driven Cold War (which rarely was cold), the hemisphere witnessed scenarios of staggering violence and loss when dictatorships, not democracies, held sway in Latin America.

Courage and resilience

Here we meet memorable heroes and villains, as well as protagonists on both sides who exhibit great courage, ingenuity and resilience. Grandin's resurrection of less-studied Latin American heroes such as Father Bartolomé de las Casas and Francisco de Miranda, and his textured depictions of US New Dealers and Cold Warriors, are particularly compelling.

His skills as a writer enable him to conjure up bygone eras with such verve that we can virtually embed ourselves in the material culture of the times. Through him we experience the intensity of political debate on the eve of the 18th-century American revolutions, and sense the giddy excitement of possibilities that animated young reformers and revolutionaries during the explosive decade of the 1960s. Grandin not only takes us inside the corridors of power in Washington, DC, but allows us to experience what it was like to participate in political and cultural life in the small cafes of places such as Mexico City.

Apart from providing an incisive view of political and economic trends, he shows how pivotal changes in the Catholic and Protestant churches, and in religious belief and culture – particularly through the impact of Liberation Theology in Latin America – transformed the political stakes of the hemisphere during and after the Cold War. He also analyses innovative thinking by Latin American economists and shows how, over the long haul, Latin American jurists and statesmen produced the corpus of American international law that loomed large in the founding of the United Nations. These are all significant achievements of a new benchmark history. **H**

Gilbert M Joseph is Farnam professor emeritus of history at Yale University

GETTY IMAGES

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY By **Jonathan Wright** and **Danny Bird**
HISTORY COOKBOOK **Soul cakes**
CITIES **Kingston**, Jamaica

EXHIBITION

Fashion queen

Step into a world of opulence and scandal at the UK's first exhibition dedicated to history's most fashionable queen, Marie Antoinette. From her own silk slippers and final handwritten note, to the ill-fated royal's influence on dazzling couture by Dior, Chanel and Westwood, discover more than 250 exquisite objects – many never seen outside France before. Costumes from Sofia Coppola's 2006 movie, *Marie Antoinette*, immersive scent experiences and fantastical reinterpretations of the queen's style bring this iconic figure to life.

Marie Antoinette Style
V&A, South Kensington, London / 20 September 2025–22 March 2026 / *vam.ac.uk*

Kate Moss poses as Marie Antoinette in the Coco Chanel suite at the Ritz Paris hotel. The image, captured by fashion photographer Tim Walker in 2012, features in a new exhibition at the V&A

TIM WALKER

What's on this week?
Visit *historyextra.com* for updates on upcoming history TV and radio programmes

EXHIBITIONS

Treasure: History Unearthed

Museum of Liverpool / 13 September 2025–29 March 2026 / *liverpoolmuseums.org.uk*

Bronze Age gold, Viking silver hoards and Roman coins (above) star in a spectacular display of archaeological treasure. Spanning more than 5,000 years, the exhibition brings together discoveries made in fields, forests and riverbeds across Wales and England – each item with its own fascinating story. With bilingual displays in Welsh and English plus glimpses of behind-the-scenes museum work and scientific analysis, it's a rare chance to get up close to objects from the distant past.

Picture Post: A Twentieth Century Icon

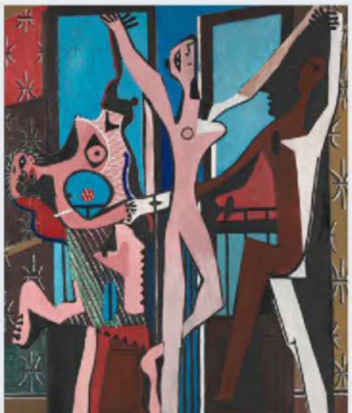
National Museum Cardiff / Until 9 November / *museum.wales*

Discover the world as seen in the pages of *Picture Post*, the groundbreaking photo-magazine that documented British life between the 1930s and the 1950s. Focusing on photo-essays spanning wartime resilience, social reform and the rise of pop culture, this exhibition reveals how *Picture Post* shaped the nation's view of itself. Whether capturing the streets of Tiger Bay or global icons, the images provide a captivating window into the era.

Theatre Picasso

Tate Modern / 17 September 2025–12 April 2026 / *tate.org.uk*

Pablo Picasso steps onto Tate Modern's stage this autumn in a centenary celebration of the artist's masterpiece, *The Three Dancers* (below). From *The Weeping Woman* (1937) to the UK debut of the *Minotaur* silk tapestry, the displays feature around 50 works that erupt with colour and drama, revealing Picasso's enduring fascination with theatre. Staged by artist Wu Tsang and curator Enrique Fuenteblanca, the exhibition recasts Picasso as performer and eternal showman.



MALLARD
4468

Michael Portillo's latest series celebrates the first steam-powered, passenger-carrying service to run on a public railway

TV

Back on the tracks

On 27 September 1825, *Locomotion* No. 1, built by George and Robert Stephenson, became the first steam locomotive to haul a passenger-carrying train on a public railway, the Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR). While it would be several years before the company ran regular steam-powered passenger services – initially the S&DR's locomotives were used for hauling coal – it was a key moment in the birth of Britain's railway system.

Two centuries later, in a two-part series celebrating this rich industrial heritage, Michael Portillo revisits the opening of the S&DR, gets hands-on with a replica *Locomotion* No. 1 and considers how green tech will shape the railways of the future.

200 Years of the Railways with Michael Portillo

BBC Two / Tuesday 16 September

Bettany Hughes (left) tells the story of an ancient Arab people, with the help of experts Katia Schörle and Jan Francke

TV

Desert civilisation

Who were the Nabataeans? It's a question that lies at the heart of this latest offering from Bettany Hughes, which traces the story of a desert people whose civilisation emerged between the fourth and second centuries BC, and who inhabited northern Arabia and the southern Levant.

The three-part series begins in Hegra in modern-day Saudi Arabia. Here, the classicist explores the sun-bleached remains of a city that once bustled with life. Subsequent shows take Hughes along ancient caravan routes and to the spectacular Nabataean capital, Petra.

Bettany Hughes' Lost Worlds: The Nabataeans

Channel 4 & All 4 / Airing and streaming now

SUCCESSION PICASSO DACS, LONDON 2025/WEST CHESHIRE MUSEUM/BBC/CHANNEL 4

Ladies Mary (Michelle Dockery) and Edith (Laura Carmichael) in *Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale*

CARNIVAL FILMS/BBC/AMERICAN AIRLINES

FILM

Changing times

The 1930s were tough for swathes of the British aristocracy as inheritance taxes and economic headwinds collided with a decline in deference. It's a decade that acts as a backdrop to the third and final film in Julian Fellowes' long-running *Downton Abbey* franchise, which finds Robert Crawley, the 7th Earl of Grantham (Hugh Bonneville) and the crew grappling with financial issues. Matters aren't helped by Lady Mary Talbot (Michelle Dockery) finding herself at the centre of a public scandal caused by her divorce.

While the late Maggie Smith's formidable dowager countess will be much missed, many familiar faces will return – including Paul Giamatti as Harold Levinson, brother of Cora Crawley, countess of Grantham (Elizabeth McGovern).

Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale
In cinemas from Friday 12 September

Dressed in elaborately decorated sherwanis, Rylan and Rob Rinder attend Diwali celebrations held at the royal residence of Jaipur City Palace

TV

Cultural exchanges

Building on the success of *Rob and Rylan's Grand Tour*, which in 2025 took the Bafta for best factual entertainment show, barrister Rob Rinder and broadcaster Rylan once again set off travelling – to India. It was a destination inspired by Rinder's love of EM Forster, whose *A Passage to India* (1924) was heavily influenced by the writer's own travels on the subcontinent.

According to Rinder, speaking when the series was announced, filming in the country "gifted me the sense of being more alive". As with *Grand Tour*, the focus will be on culture and history, and highlights will include a visit to Varanasi on the banks of the Ganges, one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities and renowned as a place of pilgrimage.

Rob and Rylan's Passage to India
BBC Two / mid-September

RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

Hotel of hope

In an Afghanistan that has endured years of conflict, Kabul's Hotel Inter-Continental has been a beacon of continuity. Since opening in 1969, it has endured through coups, the Soviet occupation, civil war, the post-9/11 invasion and the rise, fall and rise again of the Taliban. It's a story told by the BBC's chief international correspondent, Lyse Doucet, in **Book of the Week: The Finest Hotel in Kabul** (BBC Radio 4, Monday 15 September). We begin in 1971, a time when the hotel was famed for its opulence, sophistication and extraordinary views across the Hindu Kush. Throughout, the focus is on the hotel's staff – a way to explore how ordinary Afghans have negotiated all that has befallen them.

In **Archive on Four: Nine Votes That Count** (BBC Radio 4, Saturday 13 September), Mark Damazar explores the story of the US Supreme Court. It turns out that trying to pack the court with sympathetic judges is not just a modern phenomenon. In 1937, Franklin D Roosevelt tried to add more justices to the court in a bid to shape its rulings, a move that caused political uproar.

Mixing a rich aural soundscape and the reflections of poet Katrina Porteous, **Illuminated: How Trains Shrank Space and Time** (BBC Radio 4, Sunday 21 September) is a reflection on how railway travel has shaped the way we see the world.

Forthcoming episodes of the ever-excellent **Witness History** strand include a programme about the passing of **The Enabling Act** (BBC World Service, Tuesday 9 September). This revisits 23 March 1933, the day on which Hitler consolidated power in Germany. In **9/11: The Generosity of Gander** (BBC World Service, Thursday 11 September), pilot Beverley Bass remembers being stranded in a small town in Newfoundland because of the closure of American airspace. It's a tale of the generosity of locals, who had to cope with 38 aeroplanes being diverted to their town, effectively doubling its population.

Other forthcoming shows will deal with subjects such as the founding of Médecins Sans Frontières and the invention of Microsoft Excel. H

For *Witness History*, pilot Beverley Bass remembers an unexpected stopover

Kevin Costner is presenting an eight-part series on the history of the American frontier

TV

Frontier tales

Having long made a big chunk of his living from playing frontiersmen and cowboys, notably Lieutenant John J Dunbar in the Oscar-laden *Dances with Wolves*, Kevin Costner turns TV presenter to front an eight-part series charting the story of the American frontier. In part, the focus is on key figures from the era, such as Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, and the Indigenous woman who helped the duo map the Louisiana Territory, Sacagawea.

We're also promised an exploration of the conflicts that played out in the West, struggles that shaped subsequent American history, and, of course, stories of violent encounters between lawmen and gun-toting outlaws. H

Kevin Costner's The West
Sky History / Monday 15 September

GAMES / Siege warfare

JAMES OSBORNE plays a crusades-themed reboot of an old favourite among real-time strategy fans

Stronghold Crusader: Definitive Edition
FireFly Studios / £16.99

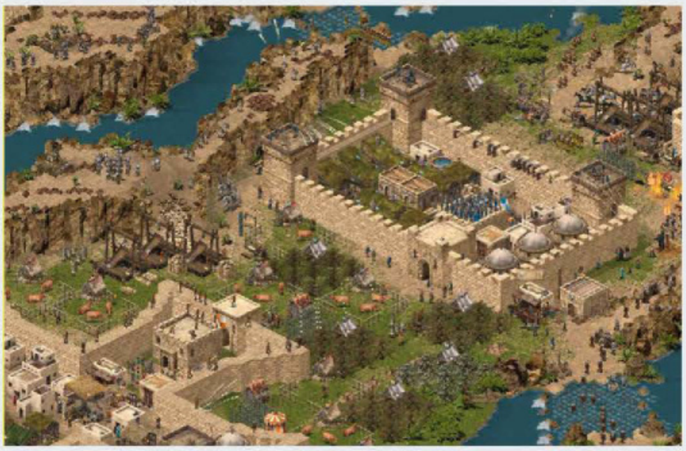
Originally released in 2002, *Stronghold Crusader* was a spin-off from the medieval castle-builder *Stronghold*, shifting the action from England to the sun-scorched Levant. Two decades on, a new version of the game has made its debut.

Stronghold Crusader: Definitive Edition returns players to the desert fortresses that dotted the fragile, bloodied boundaries between Christendom and the Islamic world. The historical setting spans the late 11th to late 12th centuries: a period bookmarked by the First and Third Crusades. The game evokes this fractious world by handing players control in different campaigns, including the climactic siege of Jerusalem.

It's a respectful remaster of the 2002 version, a clean, well-presented return to a title that has long held cult status among real-time strategy fans. The original campaigns remain intact, now supported by improved visuals, a modernised UI and small-but-noticeable refinements. But the upgrades don't quite solve all of the game's long-standing issues, including awkward path-finding.

However, the game still excels in its tone and in its focus on the details. As with the original *Stronghold Crusader*, each map presents a different balance of financial constraints, terrain, and defensive pressure. Through this emphasis on the economics of warfare (where grain, taxes and labour must be managed amid the constant threat of siege), the game conjures a kind of logistical dread that feels historically grounded.

The new *Stronghold Crusader* doesn't attempt a grand interpretation of the crusades. Instead, like the original, it focuses on the local, the tactical and the structural details of medieval warfare. H



In *Stronghold Crusader: Definitive Edition* players need to manage their limited resources if they are to succeed

James Osborne is digital content producer for *HistoryExtra*

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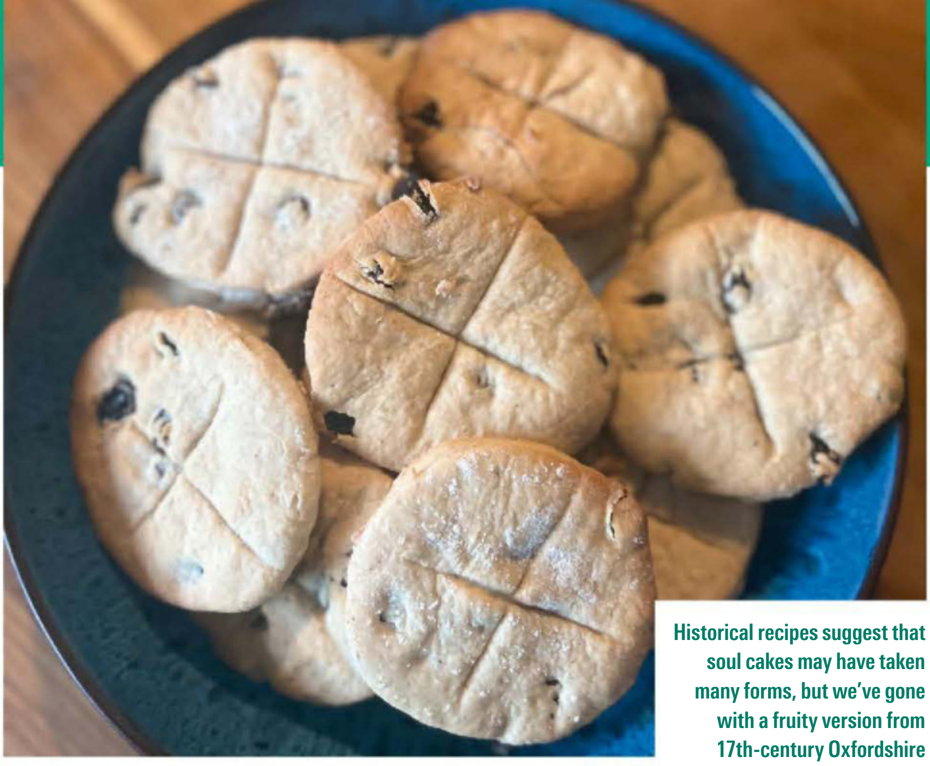
RECIPE

Soul cakes

ELEANOR BARNETT bakes a forgotten sweet treat that formerly lay at the heart of our Halloween traditions



Historical recipes suggest that soul cakes may have taken many forms, but we've gone with a fruity version from 17th-century Oxfordshire

Halloween trick-or-treating is seemingly an excuse for kids to consume far too many sweets. But this modern tradition has a more virtuous – and tastier! – origin: soul cakes.

The word 'Halloween' is a truncated version of 'All Hallows' Eve', the day before All Hallows' Day (or All Saints' Day), which falls on 1 November. In medieval Catholicism, the period around this and All Soul's Day on 2 November was a time to remember the dead. In parts of England, biscuits or cakes, often marked with a cross, were doled out to help souls pass through Purgatory, an intermediate state between Earth and Heaven.

In 17th-century Shropshire, for example, visitors called round neighbouring houses and were offered a soul cake to the rhyme, 'A soule-cake, a soule-cake/Have mercy on all Christen soules for a soule-cake'. The idea is not too dissimilar to the Mexican *Dia De Los Muertos* custom of making sweet breads decorated with crossbones made of dough, which are placed on *ofrendas* (altars) in people's homes to commemorate deceased loved ones. Comparable soul cakes are still made and distributed in Portugal and the Philippines.

Sweet treats similar to soul cakes are still baked in Mexico to mark the *Dia De Los Muertos*

DREAMSTIME/ELEANOR BARNETT

As the soul cake tradition evolved, groups of poor people went from house to house asking for money and food, including (but not limited to) soul cakes. In some ways, the poor were thought to stand in for the souls of the dead, but it was also simply a form of legitimised begging. Sometimes they'd sing songs like this one, standardised in the 19th century: 'Soul soul for a soul cake/I pray good misses a soul cake/an apple, a pear, a cherry/any good thing to make us merry.'

Known as 'souling', this practice was first dubbed 'trick or treating' in Canada in the 1920s, where it merged with the mischief and guising traditions that had begun in Ireland before Halloween's Christianisation, as part of the pagan Samhain festival. In the postwar era, mass-produced sweets began to replace homemade cakes and fruits.

But what were soul cakes originally made of? Some 19th-century recipes from Shropshire are for egg-risen spiced buns, while a much earlier record from Lancashire and Herefordshire suggests that soul cakes were instead simple oat cakes, presumably bereft of expensive spices since they were handed out to the poor. Another 17th-century recipe, this time from Oxfordshire, is for a soft, slightly risen biscuit made using ale barm, the froth on top of ale as it ferments (whose unpredictability as a rising agent, incidentally, gave us the word 'barmy').

It's this warming, fruity version – perfect for the gloomy, spooky evenings of autumn – that I have recreated here. H

Makes: 15 biscuits
Difficulty: 3/10
Time taken: 1 hour

INGREDIENTS

100ml ale
1 sachet/7g dried yeast
320g flour
150g caster sugar
¼ tsp each ground nutmeg, cloves and mace
70g butter
50ml Oloroso/medium sherry
40g raisins or currants

METHOD

1. Warm (but don't boil) the ale on the hob for a few seconds and add in the yeast (to approximate ale barm).
2. Mix the flour, sugar and spices.
3. Add the butter, and squeeze it into the dry ingredients with your fingers until it's crumbly and no big chunks of butter are left.
4. Slowly mix in the ale, then the sherry, until the mixture is elastic but not too sticky (you can add more flour if needed).
5. Stir in the dried fruit.
6. Cover the dough and let it rest for 15 minutes.
7. Roll out the dough on a floured surface until 1.25cm thick and cut out 8cm circles.
8. Place biscuits on a lined baking tray, using a knife to score a cross on each.
9. Pre-heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan) while letting the dough rest for another 15 minutes.
10. Bake for 15 minutes.

Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University. She is the author of *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Apollo, 2024), and posts @Historyeats on Instagram

PODCAST

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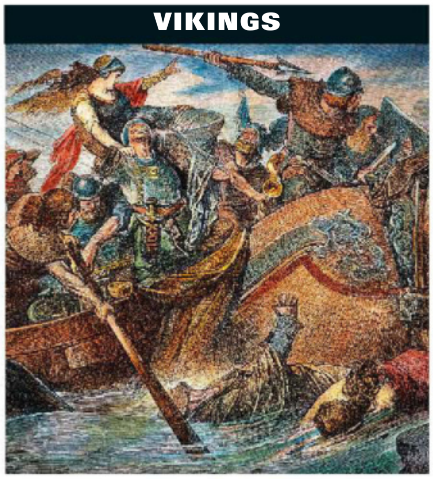
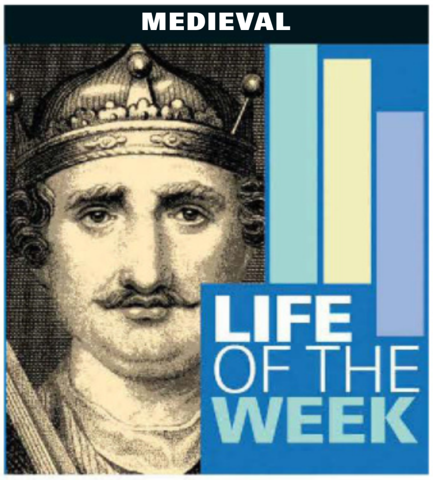
VIKINGS



Norse latitudes

What do the Vikings have to do with the recent histories of Russia and Ukraine? **Martyn Whittock** reveals how Norse settlers headed east as well as west, and examines their legacy in the region – one that can still be felt today.

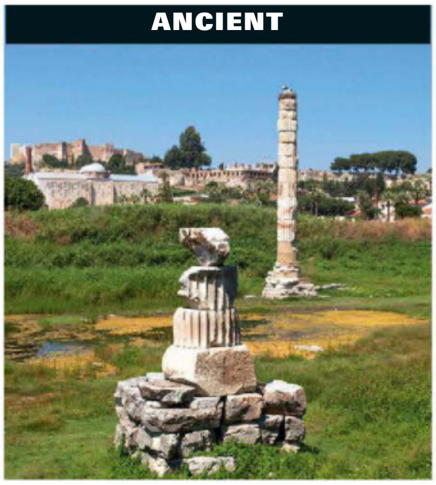
MEDIEVAL



I came, I saw, I conquered

As new BBC One drama *King and Conqueror* hits the screens, **David Bates** gives the historical lowdown on the real William of Normandy, charting his life story and his part in the dramatic events of 1066.

ANCIENT



Tales from the temple

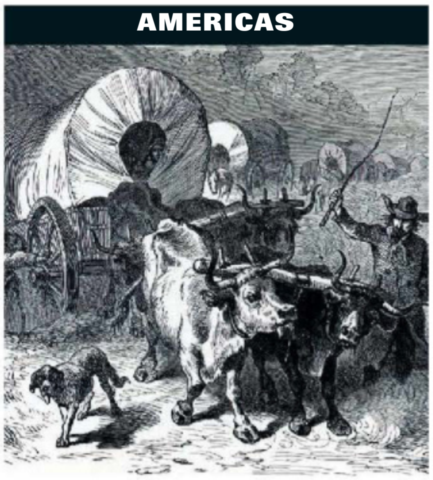
Arson, murder, betrayal and goddesses: the story of the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus has it all. **Bettany Hughes** revisits one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World to explore its significance – and to reveal its secrets.

EMPIRE

Colonial connections

Histories of the British Caribbean tend to focus on plantation slavery. But **Imaobong Umoren** argues that it's only by tracing the story from the 16th century to the present that we can fully understand interlinked themes of colonialism and racism.

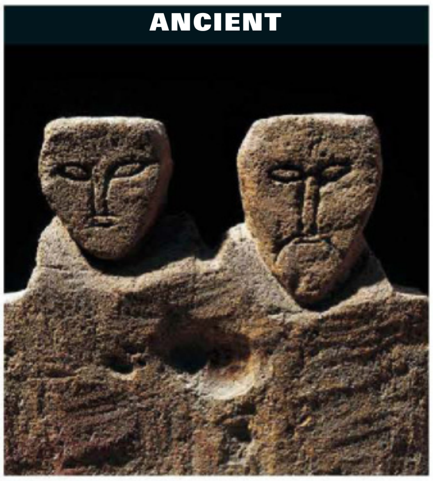
AMERICAS



Life on the edge

From bison hunts to arduous wagon trails and abandoned hopes, **Karen Jones** explores life on the 19th-century American frontier, revealing how settlers scratched out an existence – and how they impacted the environment and indigenous peoples.

ANCIENT



Made in the Med

Flourishing in the eastern Mediterranean c1500–300 BC, the Phoenicians are often overlooked. **Josephine Crawley Quinn** answers listeners' questions on this ancient civilisation, exploring the significance of Carthage and their prowess as mariners.

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

Kingston in five places

Jamaica's capital has experienced conquest and colonisation, natural disasters and cultural rebirth. **AUDRA A DIPTÉE** picks five historical sites to visit

① National Gallery of Jamaica

Art and soul

The oldest and largest public art museum in the English-speaking Caribbean, established in 1974, features both historical and contemporary art – paintings, portraits, wooden creations and more. It originally focused largely on Jamaican artists, but now also showcases those in other parts of the Caribbean and among the Caribbean diaspora.

The flagship exhibition is the Kingston Biennial, shaped by a high-profile guest curator, but there are also permanent collections highlighting key artists and periods in Jamaican cultural history. The AD Scott Collection, for instance, traces the evolution of the country's art in the years before and following independence in 1962.

Particularly fascinating for those interested in Jamaica's history is the Pre-20th Century Collection. This features artefacts dating back to the 11th century AD created by the island's indigenous pre-Columbian Taino inhabitants, as well as pieces produced during the Spanish and early British colonial periods, including many reflecting experiences and perceptions of enslaved peoples.

The National Gallery is home to artworks from across the Caribbean and beyond

Once named after Queen Victoria, St. William Grant Park now honours a former union activist

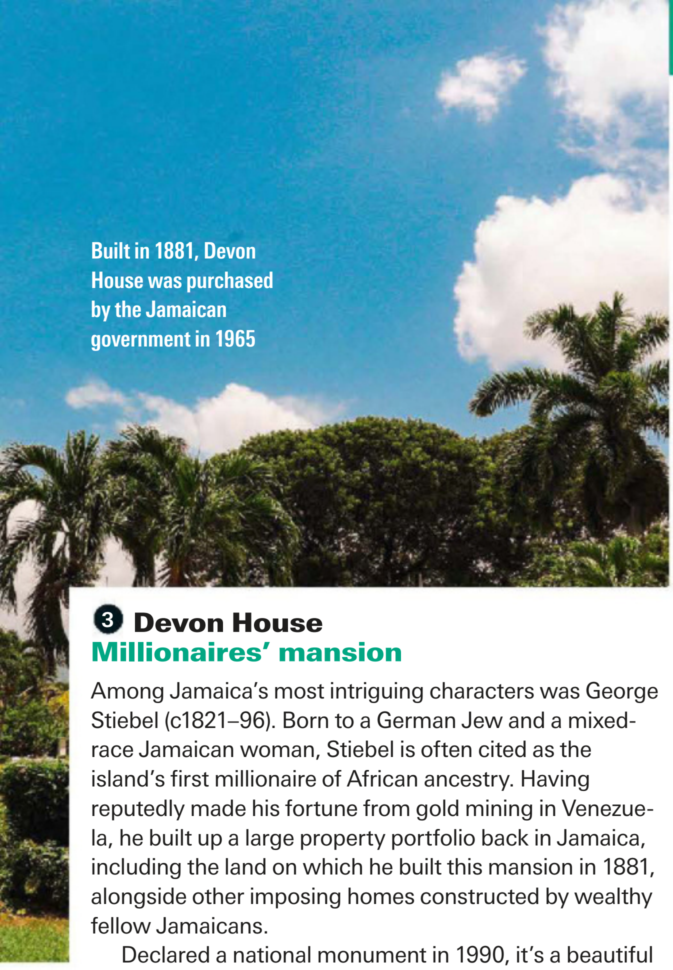
② St. William Grant Park

What's in a name?

Today, this plaza in downtown Kingston is named for St. William Grant, a key figure in Jamaica's labour movement. A working-class activist and powerful orator, Grant spoke up for the rights of workers and promoted strikes, getting beaten and arrested by the police in 1938 for his trouble.

The space was originally called Victoria Park in honour of the British queen, and was only renamed after Grant's death in 1977. It now features monuments commemorating aspects of Jamaica's history, notably national heroes who contributed to the fight against colonialism – but also statues of colonial-era figures including Queen Victoria herself and Sir Charles Metcalfe, governor of Jamaica from 1839 to 1842. More contemporary figures include Sir Alexander Bustamante, Jamaica's first prime minister, and Norman Manley, the first and only Premier of Jamaica, who was born to mixed-race parents on the island.

The Queen Victoria statue originally had pride of place in the park. After independence it was removed altogether, then placed in a less prominent spot, reflecting a shift in perceptions of these figures in Jamaica.



Built in 1881, Devon House was purchased by the Jamaican government in 1965

❸ Devon House
Millionaires' mansion

Among Jamaica's most intriguing characters was George Stiebel (c1821–96). Born to a German Jew and a mixed-race Jamaican woman, Stiebel is often cited as the island's first millionaire of African ancestry. Having reputedly made his fortune from gold mining in Venezuela, he built up a large property portfolio back in Jamaica, including the land on which he built this mansion in 1881, alongside other imposing homes constructed by wealthy fellow Jamaicans.

Declared a national monument in 1990, it's a beautiful blend of Georgian architecture and a Caribbean aesthetic, furnished with period pieces from the West Indies and Europe that reflect the mixed colonial styles of the 19th century. Guided tours explore Stiebel's story and provide glimpses into life in the mansion during his family's tenure. The house stands in lovely landscape gardens, encompassing shops selling crafts made by local artisans and a cafe serving typically Jamaican patties and rotis.

❹ Emancipation Park
For freedom

This serene space in uptown Kingston opened on 31 July 2002, a day before Emancipation Day, which commemorates the liberation of enslaved people in Jamaica in 1838 – shockingly, 31 years after the slave trade was 'abolished' in the British empire.

The park is a lovely expanse with fountains, a jogging track, public artworks and a stage. Built into fences and other elements by architect Kamau Kambui are numerous West African Adinkra symbols, in tribute to enslaved people transported to Jamaica. Among the artworks are busts of Jamaican heroes including Norman Manley, Sir Alexander Bustamante and activist Marcus Garvey, so the park is a celebration of what was achieved after the end of slavery, as well as a recognition of that horrible chapter.

Perhaps the most striking piece is the 3-metre *Redemption Song*. Installed in 2003, it comprises two figures – a man and a woman of African ancestry – looking up to the sky, possibly contemplating their life after emancipation. It was a very controversial piece when unveiled, both because of the nudity and because the artist, Laura Facey, is not of African ancestry.

Laura Facey's statue *Redemption Song* is named after the Bob Marley classic

ALAMY

Now a museum, the former home of reggae superstar Bob Marley attracts countless visitors

BOB MARLEY MUSEUM

❺ Bob Marley Museum
Life of a legend

The island's most famous musician and singer was a reggae pioneer who took the distinctively Jamaican style of music onto the international stage. To discover more about his life and art, visit the house in which Bob Marley lived from 1975 until his death from cancer in 1981, aged just 36.

Converted into a museum six years later by his widow, Rita, the house today displays many of his possessions including personal photos and gold discs. You can also see bullet holes from the attack by seven gunmen in December 1976, ahead of the free Smile Jamaica concert staged in an attempt to quell political violence. Bob, Rita, his manager Don Taylor and another employee, Louis Griffiths, were all injured but survived.

As well as the usual gift shop and record shop, you'll find the One Love Cafe serving ital food – plant-based dishes consistent with the Rastafarian culture.

Audra A Diptée is an associate professor at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. Her current project exploring hidden aspects of Caribbean history is 'Chained in Paradise: How History Was Used to Change the Future'. She was speaking to travel writer Paul Bloomfield

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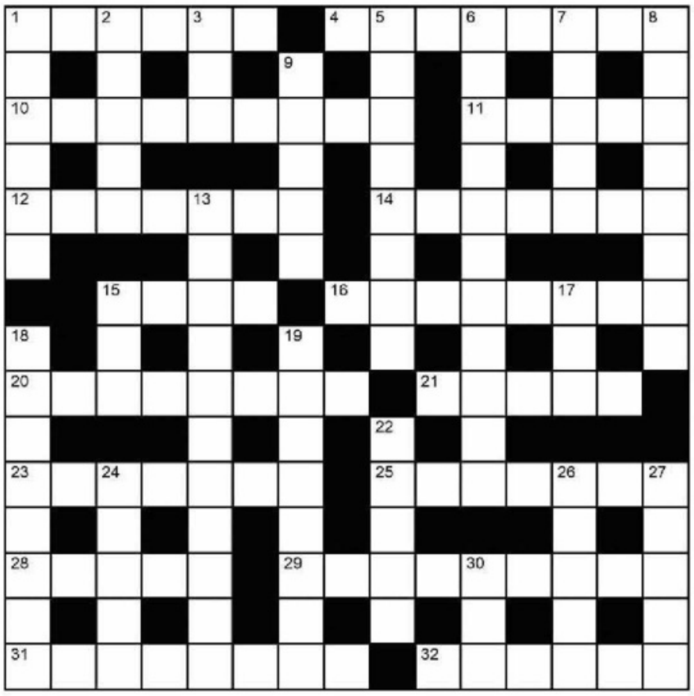
PRIZE CROSSWORD



Across

1 Legal term, dating to the 1500s, for eg a deed held temporarily by a third party (6)

4 Another name for the Maze Prison, County Down, housing paramilitary prisoners from the early 1970s (4,4)

10 Scottish sea basin, principal naval base in the two world wars (5,4)

11 African republic gaining independence in 1960 with Hamani Diori as its president (5)

12 Scottish valley, scene of an infamous massacre in 1692 (7)

14 Army officer whose three-decade rule in Indonesia began in 1967 (7)

15 Member of one of the largest ethnic groups in the Middle East, which has never obtained a permanent nation state (4)

16 Member of one of a series of Christian military expeditions against Muslim powers (8)

20 Madeleine ____, US's first female secretary of state, who pushed for Nato military intervention in the Kosovo conflict (8)

21/26 down The radical communist movement whose notorious bloody rule of Cambodia was ended in 1979 (5,5)

23 A short, broad slashing sword associated with naval battles (7)

25 Anglo-Saxon sub-division of a shire, in use up to the 19th century (7)

28 Insurance association whose name derives from Edward ____, owner of a London coffee house where underwriters met (5)

29 Old Sarum was the original site of this city (9)

31 Post-Reformation series of legislation requiring certain religious standards for public office (4,4)

32 Dragon symbol of the ancient kingdom of Wessex (6)

Down

1 Low-ranking naval officer, traditionally the flag-bearer (6)

2 Major English poet, long forgotten, who died in an asylum in 1864 (5)

3 16th-century warrior ____ Nobunaga, a unifier of feudal Japan (3)

5 This Shropshire town's name may have derived from Oswald, king of Northumbria, killed in a battle on the site (8)

6 12th/13th-century warrior-ruler whose empire stretched from China's Pacific coast to the Adriatic (7,4)

7 10th-century Anglo-Saxon king of England known as 'the Peaceful' (5)

8 Sir William ____, British lawyer and chancellor of the exchequer under Gladstone and Rosebery (8)

9 Civilisation of the Gulf Coast of Mexico (c1200–400 BC), noted for its colossal stone head sculptures (5)

13 Queen of the Brigantes who allied with the Romans against Caratacus (11)

15 Soviet security agency from 1954–91 (3)

17 John ____, 16th-century mathematician and occultist, and the basis (it is believed) of Shakespeare's character Prospero (3)

18 A great knight of Arthurian legend, Galahad's father (8)

19 Eg one of the 12th/13th-century hoard of four found on the Isle of Lewis in 1831 (5,3)

22 People from the Arctic coast of Alaska, predecessors of the Inuit (5)

24 Simple stone ones were characteristic of the Oldowan industry (5)

26 See 21 across

27 Moshe ____, Israeli general and statesman (1915–81) (5)

30 A secretive role of author Daniel Defoe around the time of the Acts of Union (3)

Compiled by **Eddie James**

This channel in the Orkney Islands has been used as a naval base since Viking times – but what is its name? *(10 across)*

ALAMY

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Solution to our August 2025 crossword

Across 1 Medici 4 Trapper 9 Reform Act 10 Nixon 11 Avery 12 Tombstone 13 Soldene 15 Skylab 17 Abbas I 19 Indiana 21 Partition 23 Lisle 25 Lenin 26 Stonewall 27 Ashdown 28 Aspern

Down 1 Murmansk 2 Defoe 3 Carlyle 4 Totem 5 Amnesty 6 Pax Romana 7 Ranke 8 Galtieri 14 Labyrinth 15 Spion Kop 16 Magellan 18 Asiento 20 Dolmens 21 Pella 22 Ibsen 24 Stane

Four winners of *Forgotten Churches*:
Bernard Doherty, Manchester; Aileen McClintock, Holywood; Samantha Brown, Paisley; Beverley Smith, Birmingham

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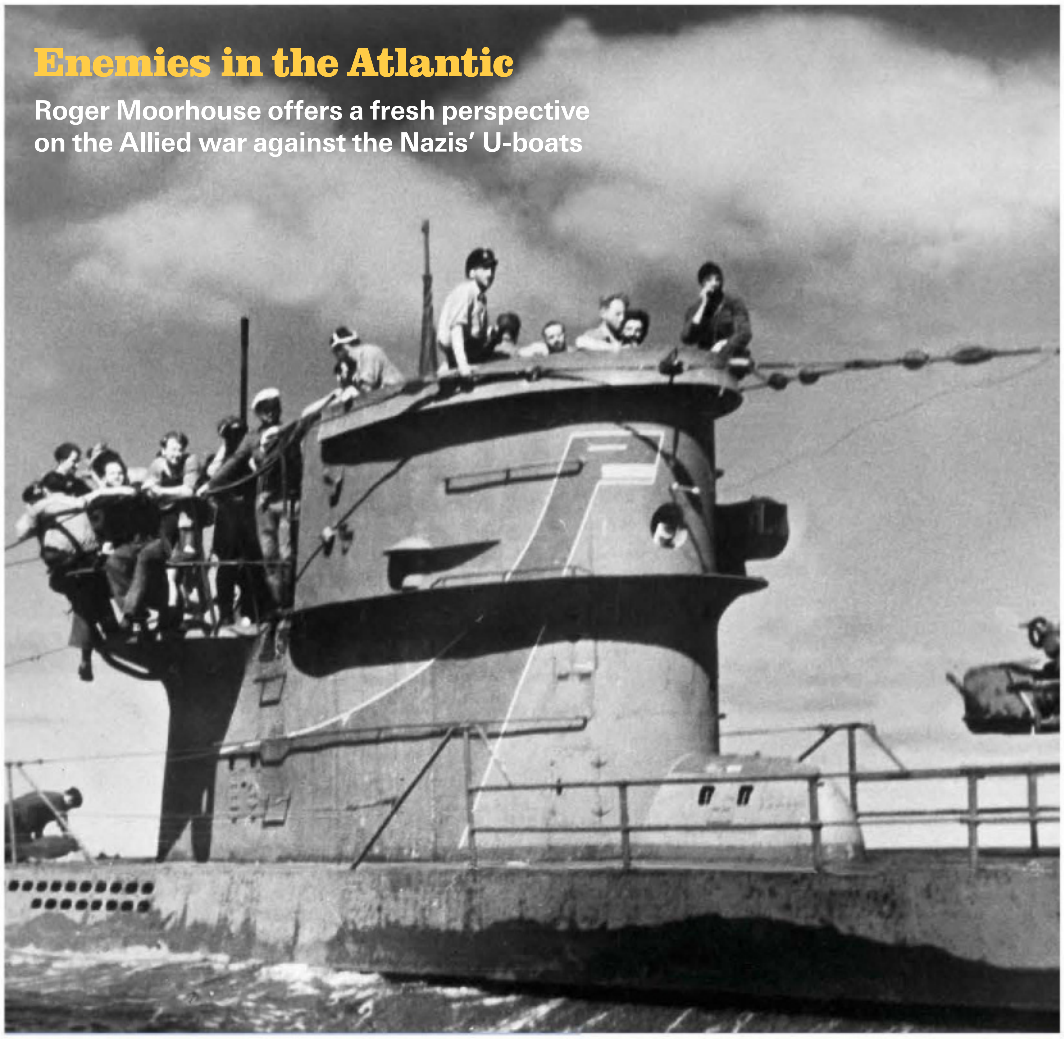
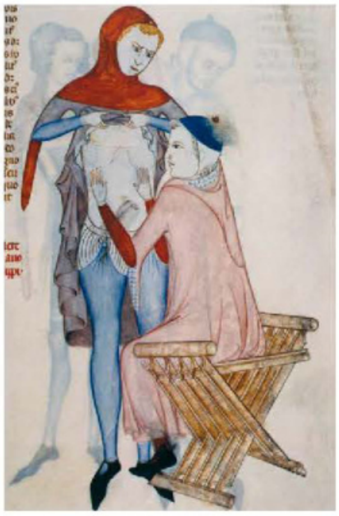


Enemies in the Atlantic

Roger Moorhouse offers a fresh perspective on the Allied war against the Nazis' U-boats



Medieval cures

James Freeman shares some intriguing methods for dealing with illness and injury in the Middle Ages

Haunted by hounds

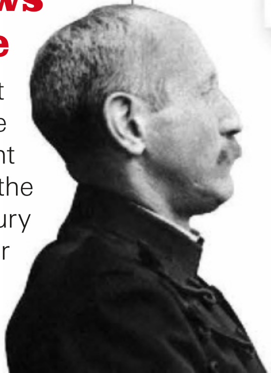
Karen Jones reveals why ghostly canines have been a long-standing fixture in Britons' imaginations

Fighting back

Sudhir Hazareesingh describes how enslaved Africans resisted their captors in the Americas

Fake news in France

Mike Rapport examines the role of print media in the late 19th-century Dreyfus Affair



Out of dates?

Robert Blackmore argues that our historical attention is overly focused on milestone years such as 1066, 1492 and 1815

TOPFOTO/ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

MY HISTORY HERO

Journalist and broadcaster ***Katya Adler*** *chooses*

Rita Levi-Montalcini

1909–2012

Katya Adler has been the BBC's Europe editor since 2014. She has twice been named Broadcast Journalist of the Year

When did you first hear about Rita Levi-Montalcini? When I had to help my daughter find an inspirational woman in history for a school research project. Rita, who achieved such amazing things against the odds, really struck a chord with me and my daughter. Her life story also provides a new lens on a fascinating period in history.

What kind of woman was she? Rita was a strong, determined, intelligent woman, but was born in the early 20th century – still a sexist time. Initially wanting to be a writer, she went into medicine after a close family friend died of stomach cancer. She was an outstanding student but, as a Jew in Fascist Italy, she was barred from working at a university. Headstrong Rita set up a laboratory in her bedroom instead. When the Germans invaded Italy in 1943, she was hidden by non-Jewish Italians to save her from a concentration or death camp, and continued her research in an 'underground' laboratory.

What made her a hero? First and foremost, her medical research, which is key to our understanding of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. She's one of only 25 women to have won a Nobel prize for science, so that was a massive triumph. I also love the fact that, despite the difficulties she faced, Rita never gave up. She always kept hope alive – continuing with her scientific research until she died, aged 103. Another thing I admire is the way she championed both the young and the elderly. Her motto was "add life to your years" – make the best of things and live life to the fullest!

What was her finest hour? I don't think there was any one finest hour. Instead, I'd argue that it was a life well lived – she never stopped trying to make the world a better place. The most impressive people I talk to as a journalist are not necessarily political leaders or celebrities but those who, like Rita, break down barriers and try to fight prejudice.

Is there anything that you don't particularly admire about her? Rita was embroiled in a funding scandal for a medical drug later in life. I think it's important to know when a public figure messes up – but do you 'cancel' the life of someone who sought to make the world better? That said, I do find it rather troubling that she credited her success in part to eating one meal a day and not having a life partner – I wouldn't want my daughters to grow up thinking a woman had to live her life that way to be successful.

What would you ask her if you could meet her? I'd invite her to join me and another hero of mine, Al-'Ijliyyah [the 10th-century Muslim astronomer and astrolabe maker credited with creating the foundations of modern GPS navigation systems] around the dinner table – along with other innovating women. I'm sure it would make for a lively, thought-provoking discussion. H

Katya Adler was talking to York Membery

In the BBC Radio 4 series **Great Lives**, guests discuss inspirational figures: *bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxsb*

Neurobiologist Rita Levi-Montalcini, pictured in Rome in the 1970s. "She never stopped trying to make the world a better place," says Katya Adler

IN PROFILE

Rita Levi-Montalcini was a renowned neurobiologist who was a joint winner of the 1986 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for the discovery of nerve growth factor. Born in Turin to Italian Jewish parents, her early career was hindered by Mussolini's Racial Laws and she had to go into hiding during the Nazi occupation of Italy.

In 1992, she established a foundation to boost girls' science education in Africa, and 10 years later she set up the European Brain Research Institute.

> Despite the difficulties she faced, Rita never gave up. She kept hope alive – continuing with her scientific research until she died, aged 103

BRIDGEMAN/BBC

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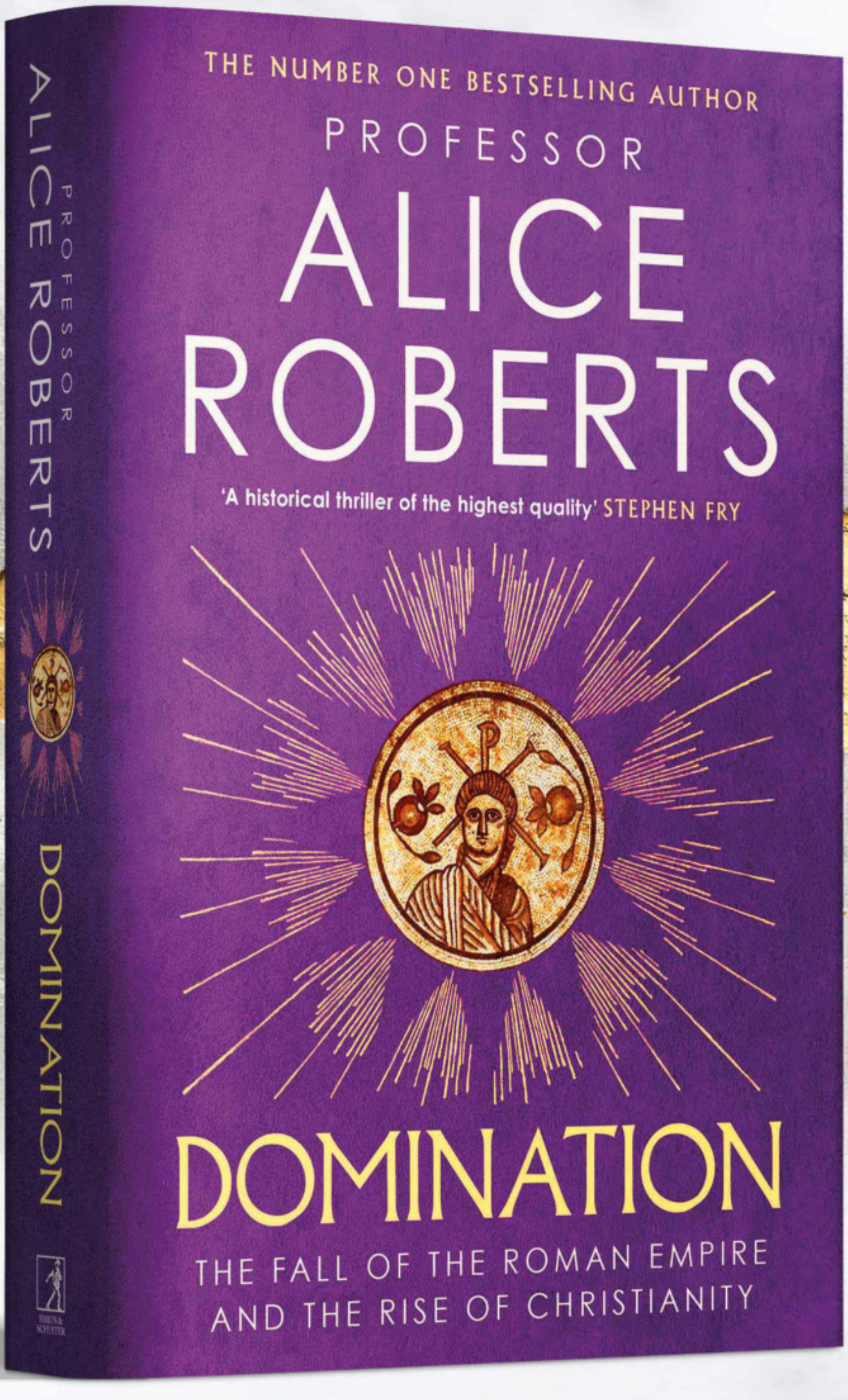
PROFESSOR
ALICE ROBERTS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